Comparison, Narrative, Meaning, and Method in Historical Sociology

Sociology 5350

Spring 2022

Mondays 3:35-6:05 via Zoom

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**Office Hours**: To Be Determined

**IF YOU MISS MORE THAN TWO CLASSES YOU WILL FAIL THE COURSE**

**Course description and goals:** This class examines the comparative, narrative, and interpretive methods historical sociologists use when investigating temporally unfolding social processes occurring in the recent or distant past. In the first part of the course we will read the methodological literature on these topics. We will then compare a wide variety of historical studies to the methodological literature to determine the degree to which historical sociologists follow and deviate from the methodological rules. We will ask how effective these scholars are at achieving the goals they set for themselves and discuss how they creatively combine different historical methods in their work. Finally, and most importantly, we will think seriously about how to use historical methods in our own research, either on their own or in conjunction with ethnographic and/or quantitative methods.

More generally, I view research as a highly creative process that, much like music and visual art, allows us to express who we are and better understand ourselves and the world. Like music and art, research is also something that situates creativity within a set of guidelines and rules, and to do it well we must be both rigorous and passionate about it. Scholars often avoid using words like passion because such words make it sound like they are being subjective rather than objective. But I do not know any scholars who are not passionate about their research, and I strongly believe that this passion derives not just from the research itself but also from their desire to make the world a better place.

It is not easy to incorporate creativity into a graduate class and I have never tried to do so before. But I am hopeful that in at least some small way I will be able to convey my passion about creativity and research to you and that the course assignments will, as a whole, help you to be more rigorous and creative in your research.

To that end, rather than asking you to write a research proposal for your end of semester assignment, I will ask you to (a) think deeply about what, in an abstract sense, most excites and motivates you about sociology (or about your own discipline if you are not a sociologist), (b) identify two broad substantive topics that clearly differ from each other but which are both based on the abstract interest that most motivates and excites you, and (c) devise two different ways to study each of these topics, creatively combining methods we discuss in this class with each other and, if you wish, with ethnographic and/or quantitative methods you have learned in other classes.

I will also ask you to write weekly summaries based on each week’s readings and may ask you to turn in additional short assignments that I hope will help you with your larger end of the semester assignment.

Needless to say, I am very excited about teaching this class and hope we all have a great semester!!!

**Required Readings:** The required readings are listed below. We will be reading several books (available at the book store) as well as journal articles and book excerpts. You can find the book excerpts, journal articles, and course syllabus on Canvas.

**You have to purchase the following books:**

Ferree, Myra Marx. 2012. *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kimeldorf, Howard. 1988. *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Paschel, Tianna. 2016. *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Reed, Isaac. 2011. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

**Evaluation:** Your grade in this course will be based upon the following:

Due Date % of Grade

1. Weekly reading summaries Sundays, midnight. 30%

(I might change when these are due)

\*Any additional short written work I ask you to do will be included in your weekly summary grade.

2. Class Participation All semester 20%

3. Final Assignment Monday, April 25, 3:35 p.m. 50%

**Adaptation of Grading Guidelines as Recommended by the Department’s Graduate Committee:**

**A**: Consistently performs well above expectations.

**A-**: Performs above expectations.

**B+**: Meets expectations.

**B**: Occasionally performs below expectations.

**B- to C**: Consistently performs below expectations.

**C- to F**: Unsatisfactory work. Serious concerns regarding student progression toward degree.

**Weekly article summaries:** Each week, each student will be responsible for writing a ***brief*** summary of all the readings (1½ -2 pages, double spaced, total) and a brief set of comments or questions about the readings (1/2-1 page, double spaced, total). You must post this to Canvas no later than midnight on the Sunday before class (I might change when these are due). **I will not accept late summaries!**

The nature of these summaries will likely change as the semester progresses. During the first part of the semester when we will be reading the methodological literature, you will summarize the key methodological themes running through the readings. In the second part of the semester when we will be reading actual historical research your summaries will discuss issues such as how effective the scholars we read are at achieving the goals they set for themselves, how they creatively combine different historical (and other) methods in their work, how they use theory in their research, the rhetorical and narrative strategies that they use, the methods they use to determine the cultural meanings that shape people’s lives, the degree to which they follow and deviate from the methodological rules, and how following and deviating from the methodological rules strengthens and/or weakens their research.

**Class participation:** Class participation is crucial in a graduate seminar. Participation involves taking part in class discussions and asking and answering questions in class in such a way as to indicate to me that you have done the reading and are actively engaged with the material. To receive participation credit you must contribute to class discussion regularly throughout the semester (without dominating the discussion) and your comments must be thoughtful and insightful. In other words, quality is just as important as quantity.

**Final Assignment:** In the next few weeks, I will hand out an assignment that asks you to (a) think deeply about what, in an abstract sense, most excites and motivates you about sociology (or about your own discipline if you are not a sociologist), (b) identify two broad substantive topics that clearly differ from each other but which are both based on the abstract interest that most motivates and excites you, and (c) devise two different ways to study each of these topics.

**Additional course requirements:**

1. Students are responsible for reading *all the assigned books, book excerpts, and articles*.
2. *Class attendance* is **mandatory** **each week** and expected of all students.
3. *Class participation* is expected. Class participation makes up 20% of your grade.

**Weekly Topics and Readings**

**Week 1 (Jan. 10): Research as Passion and Art.**

Lockhart, Paul. nd. “A Mathematician’s Lament.” **Read pp. 1-10 and 14-16**.

Emirbayer, Mustafa and Matthew Desmond. 2015. *The Racial Order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. **Read pp. 1-12**.

MacLeod, Jay. 1987. *Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations & Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder: Westview Press. **Read pp. 3-7, 11-16, and 135-141**.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1974. *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press. **Read pp. 3-11**.

**Week 2 (Jan 17): Martin Luther King Holiday. No Class.**

**However:**

1. On Sunday, January 16, you will submit an assignment in which you describe the abstract interest that most excites and motivates you about sociology (or your discipline if you are not a sociologist).
2. In addition, I will schedule a half hour meeting with each of you to talk about what you have written.

**Week 3 (Jan 24): Interpretation, Social Knowledge, and Historical Sociology.**

Reed, Isaac. 2011. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. **Read the Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2**.

Reed, Isaac. 2013. “Power: Relational, Discursive and Performative Dimensions.” *Sociological Theory* 31(3): 193-218.

Abbott, Andrew. 2001. *Time Matters: On Theory and Method*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. **Read pp. 37-60 (Transcending General Linear Reality)**.

(**OPTIONAL**)

Adams, Julia, Elisabeth Clemens, and Ann Orloff, Eds. 2005. *Remaking Modernity: Politics, History, and Sociology*. **Skim pp. 1-26**.

**Week 4 (Jan. 31): The Comparative Method and Its Challenges.**

Ragin, Charles. 1992. **Read the Introduction** in Charles Ragin and Howard Becker (Eds.) *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Burawoy, Michael. 1989. “Two Methods In Search of Science: Skocpol versus Trotsky.” *Theory and Society* 18: 759-805. **Read pp. 759-787**.

Ragin, Charles. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press. **Read Chapters 2-3 and pp. 53-55**.

(**Optional: Grant et al. use Ragin’s Comparative Method in an empirical article**). Grant, Don et al. 2010. “Bringing the Polluters Back In: Environmental Inequality and the Organization of Chemical Production.” *American Sociological Review* 75(4): 479-504.

McMichael, Philip. 1990. “Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method.” *American Sociological Review* 55: 385-397.

Fourcade, Marion. 2009. *Economists and Societies: Discipline and Profession in the United States, Britain, and France, 1890s to 1990s*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. **Read pp. 12-15**.

Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions : A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. New York: Cambridge University Press. **Read pp. 38-43**.

**Week 5 (Feb. 7): Narrative and Meaning.**

Aminzade, Ronald. 1992. “Historical Sociology and Time.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 20(4): 456-480.

Steinmetz, George. 1992. “Reflections on the Role of Social Narrative in Working-Class Formation: Narrative Theory in the Social Sciences.” *Social Science History* 16(3): 489-516.

Somers, Margaret. 1992. “Narrativity, Narrative Identity, and Social Action: Rethinking English Working Class Formation.” *Social Science History* 16(4): 591-630. **Read pp. 591-592 and 600-616**.

Hull, David. 1975. “Central Subjects and Historical Narratives.” *History and Theory* 14(3): 253-274. **Read pp. 253-263 and 273-274**.

McCullagh, Behan. 1978. “Colligation and Classification in History.” *History and Theory* 17(3): 267-284. **Read pp. 267-272**.

Spillman, Lyn. 2004. “Causal Reasoning, Historical Logic, and Sociological Explanation.” Pp. 216-233 In Jeffrey Alexander, Gary Marx, and Christine Williams (Eds.), *Self, Social Structure, and Beliefs: Explorations in Sociology*. **Read pp. 222-230**.

**Week 6 (Feb. 14): Sequence and Meaning.**

Sewell, William. 2005. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. **Read the Preface, Chapters 3 and 8 and pp. 197-204.**

Paige, Jeffrey. 1999. “Conjuncture, Comparison, and Conditional Theory in Macrosocial Inquiry.” *American Journal of Sociology* 105(3): 781-800.

Mahoney, James. 2000. “Path Dependence in Historical Sociology.” *Theory and Society* 29: 507-548.

(**Additional Week 6 readings are listed on the next page**)

(**OPTIONAL**) Bennett, Andrew and Colin Elman. 2006. “Complex Causal Relations and Case Study Methods: The Example of Path Dependence.” *Political Analysis* 14:250-267.

Capoccia, Giovanni and R. Daniel Kelemen 2007. “The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism.” *World Politics* 59(3): 341-369.

**Week 7 (Feb. 21): Meaning and Explanation.**

Reed, Isaac. 2011. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. **Read Chapters 4 and 5**.

Reed, Isaac. 2007. “Why Salem Made Sense: Culture Gender, and the Puritan Persecution of Witchcraft.” Cultural Sociology 1(2): 209-234.

Thompson, E.P. 1964. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Pantheon Books. **Read pp. 9-11 and 17-25**.

Sewell, William. 1980. *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **Read the Preface, Chapter 1 and pp. 194-206 and 211-218**.

**Week 8 (Feb. 28): Realist Approaches & Memory and Identity.**

**Meaning? I Don’t Need No Stinking Meaning!**

Downey, Liam 2015. *Inequality, Democracy, and the Environment*. New York: New York University Press. **Read pp. 59-61.**

Domhoff, G. William. 1990. *The Power Elite and the State: How Policy is Made in America*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. **Read Introduction, pp. 37-40, and Chapter 5**.

(**OPTIONAL**) Steinberg, Stephen. 1981. *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America*. Boston: Beacon Press. **Read Chapter 4.**

**Meaning, Memory, and Identity.**

Olick, Jeffrey. 2005. *In the House of the Hangman: the Agonies of German Defeat, 1943-1949*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. **Read the Preface and Chapters 1-3, 7-8, and 14**.

Traub, Alex. 2018. “India’s Dangerous New Curriculum.” *The New York Review of Books* LXV(19): 41-43. **Quickly skim article to think about another way to study elite debates about history and its significance for modern politics and society.**

**Week 9 (March 7): Michael Mann.**

Mann, Michael. 1986. *The Sources of Social Power, Vol. 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

\***Read the Preface, Chapter 1, pages 301-331 and 363-371, and Chapters 12 and 15 (the preface is a separate document)**.

**Guest Speaker: Matt Desan (Matt will send us a chapter or article to read to prepare for his visit)**

**Week 10 (March 14): Myra Marx Ferree.**

Ferree, Myra Marx. 2012. *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. **Chapter 2 is optional, but read the rest of the book**.

**Week 11 (March 21): Spring Break, No Classes**

**Week 12 (March 28): State Making.**

Adams, Julia. 1994. “The Familial State: Elite Family Practices and State-Making in the Early Modern Netherlands.” *Theory and Society* 23(4): 505-539

Loveman, Mara. 2005. “The Modern State and the Primitive Accumulation of Symbolic Power.” *American Journal of Sociology* 110(6): 1651-1683.

Downey, Liam, Elizabeth Lawrence, Micah Pyles, and Derek Lee. 2020. “Power, Hegemony, and World Society Theory: A Critical Evaluation.” *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 6:1-22.

**Guest Speaker: David Cook-Martin (David will send us a chapter or article to read to prepare for his visit)**

**Week 13 (April 4):**

**Tianna Paschel – Social Movements (and Subjectivity?).**

Paschel, Tianna. 2016. *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. **Read Chapters 1-4**.

**Settler Colonialism**

Bacon, J.M. 2018. “Settler Colonialism as Eco-Social Structure and the Production of Colonial Ecological Violence.” *Environmental Sociology*. DOI 10.1080/23251042.2018.1474725.

Steinman, Erich. 2021. “Settler Colonialism and Sociological Knowledge: Insights and Directions Forward.” *Theory and Society*. DOI 10.1007/s11186-021-09457-x. **Read pp. 2-5**.

Veracini, Lorenzo. 2010. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. **Read pages 75-83**.

Slotkin, Richard. 1973. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press. **Read pp. 17-24 and from the bottom of 554-565**.

**Week 14 (April 11): Howard Kimeldorf.**

Kimeldorf, Howard. 1988. *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

**Week 15 (April 18):**

**Meaning, Narrative, Identity, and Politics.**

Emirbayer, Mustafa and Ann Mische. 1998. “What is Agency?” *American Journal of Sociology* 103(4): 962-1023. **Read pp. 962-974**.

Jansen, Robert. 2016. “Situated Political Innovation: Explaining the Historical Emergence of New Modes of Political Practice.” *Theory & Society* 45:319-360.

Herman, Max. 2013. *Summer of Rage: An Oral History of the 1967 Newark and Detroit Riots*. New York: Peter Lang. **Read the Preface and pp. 1-53**.

**History as Social Drama.**

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin. 1986. *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. **Read the Preface and Chapters 1 and pages 62-93**.

**Week 16 (April 25): Final Assignment Due.**

\*If the pandemic miraculously ends, we will hold an early evening potluck at Professor Downey’s house.

**University Policies**

**ACCOMODATION:**

Disability, Religious & Activity Accommodations:

1. If you qualify for an accommodation due to a disability, please submit to the instructor a letter from Disability Services that details the appropriate accommodations by the end of the second week of class. Disability Services determines accommodations based upon documented disabilities. For more information call 303-492-8671, or visit their office at N200 Center for Community, or go to their website <http://disabilityservices.colorado.edu/>.

2. Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. If the observance of a religious holiday or activity conflicts with the course requirements, please make the dates of the conflict(s) known to the instructor in writing by the end of the second week of class. <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/observance-religious-holidays-and-absences-classes-andor-exams>.

3. If participation in a university-supported activity (athletic competitions, artistic performances, etc.) conflicts with the course requirements, please make the dates and nature of the conflicts known to the instructor in writing by the end of the second week of class. Students will be asked to provide evidence of participation for any exceptions.

**HONOR CODE:**

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council ([honor@colorado.edu](mailto:honor@colorado.edu); 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/student-honor-code-policy>.

**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:**

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. See polices at

<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/student-classroom-and-course-related-behavior> and at

<http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/studentconduct/code.html>

**DISCRIMINATION AND HARRASSMENT:**

The University of Colorado at Boulder Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures, the University of Colorado Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedures, and the University of Colorado Conflict of Interest in Cases of Amorous Relationships policy apply to all students, staff, and faculty. Any student, staff, or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of sexual harassment or discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550.

Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/discrimination-and-harassment-policy-and-procedures>.