

SOCIOLOGY 6041
CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY
University of Colorado Boulder

Semester: Fall 2021

Seminar: Thursdays 4:10 – 6:40 pm

Office Address: Ketchum 266

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Professor: Rachel Rinaldo

Class Location: Ketchum 1B40

Office Hours: Tuesdays 9 am – 11 am

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is intended to familiarize graduate students with the dynamic subfield of cultural sociology. Cultural sociology is a vast field that overlaps with other social sciences such as anthropology and at times with humanities. It comprises the sociology of cultural objects and forms of cultural expression, the study of cultural life broadly understood, as well as an approach to sociological investigation that emphasizes meaning and interpretation. The sociology of culture is also methodologically diverse, ranging from classic qualitative approaches such as interviews and ethnography, to discourse analysis, historical, and quantitative and mixed methods approaches.

In this course, we will start by surveying many (but not all) of the main theoretical orientations as well as major concepts, problems, and themes in the literature. We will then move on to look at how cultural sociology intersects with related topics in the discipline, modernity, agency, inequality, economic life, art, and more. I have included a mix of theoretical and more empirical work, both classics and recent work. Although I have tried to cast the net widely as well as make sure you are familiar with canonical scholarship, it is simply not possible to cover all of cultural sociology in one class. If you are interested in issues or topics not reflected in this syllabus, I encourage you to ask me for suggestions for further reading. You will see that I have selected a number of *Annual Review of Sociology* articles – these tend to provide helpful literature reviews as well as current “state of the field” essays about particular topics. You can always look at the bibliographies of these pieces for more suggestions about literature on that topic.

The reading load for this class is fairly heavy in the early weeks. This is because there is now so much important literature that you need to be familiar with to fully grasp recent work in the field. The success of this class depends on everyone doing the reading and coming to class ready for discussions.

I also strongly recommend that you regularly skim the journals that publish cultural sociology, including *Poetics*, *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, and *Cultural Sociology*, among others. *American Journal of Sociology* and *American Sociological Review* occasionally publish important theory pieces.

TEXTS RECOMMENDED FOR PURCHASE:

The following texts have been ordered at the CU Bookstore because we are reading most or all of them. You may also want to go through the syllabus and selectively purchase other books for which we are reading more than one chapter. Many can be purchased for relatively low prices from Amazon used booksellers. Please contact me if you are having difficulty affording books. When we are reading just one or two chapters from a book, these will be posted on Canvas and/or available on reserve at Norlin library.

Max Weber. 1904. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York Scribner.
Erving Goffman. 1956. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Penguin-Random House.
Edward Said. 1978. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books
David Harvey. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Wiley-Blackwell.
Anthony Giddens. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press.
Pierre Bourdieu. 1987. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press.
Ashley Mears. 2011. *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*. University of California Press.
Partha Chatterjee. 1993. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press.
Orly Clerge. 2019. *The New Noir: Race, Identity, and Diaspora in Black Suburbia*. University of California Press.
Andrew Whitehead and Sam Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. Oxford University Press.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class participation: 10%

This seminar is discussion based. I may lecture for the first 10-20 minutes, particularly in the first few weeks. You are expected to participate actively in class discussions, both by asking questions and making comments. Discussions will be based on the readings for that week.

2. Reading Reflection Papers: 50%

You are required to prepare two short essays that reflect on a particular theme in the readings for that week. Each essay should clearly identify a particular theme you found interesting or significant, develop a coherent argument about that theme, and also reflect on how the readings related to material from the preceding weeks of the course. Essays should be 4-5 double spaced pages and should include an additional page for citations. You will be assigned alphabetically for dates for these papers on the first day of class. You should not sign up for the same date that you are leading discussion. You will submit these papers on Canvas.

3. Discussion Leading: 10%

Each student will help to lead one class discussion during the semester. This will consist of coming to class with at least two discussion questions prepared, and then playing an active role to help lead discussion. You should bring a handout with your discussion questions to class, which you will

present after my introduction. The discussion questions can focus on particular readings, but at least one question should be more synthetic, incorporating at least two readings. You will sign up for discussion leading on the first day of class.

4. Final Paper: 30%

You will submit a final paper that engages with one or more themes/topics from this course. This assignment can be tailored to your needs and interests. You could use it to write a literature review that could be used for a third-year paper/master's paper/or dissertation; a theory essay, or a research paper on a topic of interest to you. I will not accept a paper that has been written for another class unless it has been substantially revised to be appropriate for this class. You must situate your analysis within cultural sociology, make use of concepts, themes, and theories from the class, and critically reflect on the subfield. You are also welcome to discuss outside readings. I expect that your paper will be 10-20 pages double spaced, but the length is flexible (content and analysis are more important). **You should email me a one paragraph proposal for your final paper by November 1 (I will not provide written feedback if you email me after that date).** You are encouraged to meet with me before April 1 to discuss your final paper ideas and you can submit your proposal whenever you are ready. **The final paper is due on December 13 by 9 am. Please submit it on Canvas.** You are welcome to submit it earlier, if you prefer.

COURSE POLICIES:

1. Graduate students are expected to treat class as part of their professional obligations by arriving on time and staying until the end of class. Although I will not take attendance, in such a small class I do notice absences. If you need to miss a class, send me an email so I know why. More than 1 or 2 absences may result in a reduction of your final grade.
2. We will have a 10-15 minute break in the middle of class (around 5:30 pm). You will sign up on the first day to bring snacks for the class.
3. Please keep track of announcements and syllabus changes. I usually make announcements in the beginning of the class and/or on Canvas. You should plan to check the Canvas site regularly for such information.
4. Please do your best to meet with me during office hours unless you have a genuine conflict with the time.
5. Grades are awarded on the basis of the quality of your work. This means written work which demonstrates good organization, sophisticated and sociologically informed content, correct grammar, and clear writing. In class discussions, this means thoughtful questions and comments that reflect your having read the assignments. Please see me right away if you are concerned about your grades. I will be using the Sociology Department's standard grading rubric:

A	Consistently performs well above expectations for the course
A-	Performs above expectations for the course
B+	Meets expectations
B	Occasionally performs below expectations
B-	Consistently performs below expectations
C	Unsatisfactory work for a doctoral student (not completing work, not attending class, poor performance on writing assignments, etc.)

COURSE SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1: (August 26) Introduction and class logistics

Come to class with an example of the word “culture” from a newspaper or magazine (digital or print) and be prepared to discuss the definition of culture implied in your example.

Section on “Culture” in Raymond Williams. 1976. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Pages 76-82.

William Sewell, Jr. 1999. “The Concept(s) of Culture” in Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds. *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

WEEK 2 (September 2): What is Cultural Sociology?

Jeffrey Alexander. 2003. *The Meanings of Social Life*. Chapter 1: The Strong Program in Cultural Sociology.

Small, Mario Luis, David J. Harding, and Michèle Lamont. 2010. "Reconsidering culture and poverty." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 629/1: 6-27.

Isaac Ariail Reed. 2017. “On the Very Idea of Cultural Sociology.” Chapter 1 in *Social Theory Now*, edited by Claudio Benzecry, Monika Krause, and Isaac Ariail Reed. University of Chicago Press.

Recommended: Jeffrey Alexander. 2021. “Recovering the Primitive in the Modern: The Cultural Turn and the Origins of Cultural Sociology.” *Thesis Eleven*.

Recommended: Cook, James W. 2012. "The Kids Are All Right: On the “Turning” of Cultural History." *The American Historical Review* 117.3: 746-771.

WEEK 3 (September 9): Foundations -- Weber

Max Weber. 1904. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Scribner.

Max Weber. 1915. “The Social Psychology of the World Religions” in Gerth and Mills, eds. *From Max Weber*. Pages 267-301.

Strongly recommended if you have not previously read it: Clifford Geertz. 1973. “Thick Description.” In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.

WEEK 4 (September 16): Foundations – Goffman and Symbolic Interactionism

Erving Goffman. 1956. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Penguin-Random House. Chapters TBA.

Herbert Blumer. 1969. "The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism." In *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*.

WEEK 5 (September 23): Marxist Cultural Theory

Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno. 1946. "The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception." Pp. 71-101 in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Raymond Williams. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press. Part II, Chapter 1 "Base and Superstructure." Chapter 6 "Hegemony."

WEEK 6 (October 7): Culture and Colonialism

Edward Said. 1978. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books. Chapters TBA

Franz Fanon. 1961. "On National Culture" (Chapter 4). From *Wretched of the Earth*.

WEEK 7 (October 14): Culture and Modernity

David Harvey. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Wiley-Blackwell. Chapters TBA.

Anthony Giddens. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press.

WEEK 8: (October 21) NO CLASS

WEEK 9 (October 28): Culture and Taste

Pierre Bourdieu. 1987. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press. Chapters TBA.

Richard A. Peterson and Roger M. Kern. 1996. "Changing highbrow taste: from snob to omnivore." *American Sociological Review*: 900-907.

WEEK 10 (November 4): Culture and Action

Ann Swidler. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51(2): 273-286.

William Sewell, Jr. 1992. "A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98(1): 1-29.

Steve Vaisey. 2009. "Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 114/6:1675-1715.

WEEK 11 (November 11): Culture and the Postcolonial

Partha Chatterjee. 1993. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Chapters TBA

Uma Narayan. 1998. "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism." *Hypatia* 13(2): 86-106.

WEEK 12 (November 18): Producing Culture

Pierre Bourdieu. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Columbia University Press. Chapter 1.

Ashley Mears. 2011. *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*. University of California Press.

WEEK 13: Thanksgiving Break – No Class

WEEK 14 (December 2): Culture and Religion

Andrew Whitehead and Sam Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. Oxford University Press.

WEEK 15 (December 9): Culture, Race, and Class

Orly Clerge. 2019. *The New Noir: Race, Identity, and Diaspora in Black Suburbia*. University of California Press.