Sociology 301 -- American Society
Summer 2009 (CRN 42289)
Professor Michael Dreiling

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Course Framework
This course is designed as a broad, but in-depth introduction to American society and culture. We will examine aspects of American culture and institutions that shape modern human experience and the ways in which they are changing. We will be paying particular attention to relations of power and conflict. In doing this, I predict we will tune-in to some of the most pressing questions and problems facing our minds and the world. What is “normal”? Who (or what) decides normality? Why has inequality persisted so much in the U.S. (and world) over the last 2 decades? How does economic power get converted to political power, and why? How and why does racial/ethnic segregation and inequality persist? How have modern institutions -- such as family, media and education -- shaped our understandings of ourselves, our goals, our loyalties, our gender identities and sexuality? What is culture and how is "it" related to social power? Who controls the mass media and does it matter in the “making of meaning”? Where is our society and world headed, and what are the possibilities? How do social movements play a part in shaping history and the allocation of power? How do you feel while the world teeters on an edge of social and ecological crisis? Why do you feel that way? By no means shall this be an uncomplicated journey. To really engage these and other questions, you can expect to read a lot (about 100 pages per week, or about 2 hours of reading for every hour of class time), think a lot, and write some… but not a lot. It will be impossible for you to take this journey unless you link heart, mind and body into the learning process, or in other words have a passion to learn and the discipline to read.

Readings
Available at the U of O Bookstore.


3) ONLINE COURSE READINGS: SEE BLACKBOARD. These readings are indicated with an asterisk (*) in the outline below.

Course Boundaries
My intention is to help create an environment to support engaged and critical intellectual exchange. Maintaining a common ground in the course readings will help us toward that end. I encourage you to complete the readings as they are listed on Blackboard. Please do your best to complete the assigned section before the respective lecture/discussion times, as there will be close links between the lectures, discussion and readings. Finally, since we meet under compressed, 4-week circumstances, with this much reading, it would be a benefit to all if we raise questions and comments in class.

Below you will find my proposal for evaluating how each of you engage the course material. My intention with this proposal is to provide a framework from which I can assess how much and to what depth each of you pursue the course material.
GRADING PROPOSAL: Three graded activities. First, 40% of your total grade is determined by your attendance and participation in class. Each day accounts for 2.5% of your grade, so be sure to attend and sign the role sheet. Everyone will receive one free (unmarked) absence. I’ve adopted this policy to eliminate the negotiations, explanations, and justifications for absences. No need to report your absences to me unless significant life changes impact your ability to participate in your school activities over more than 1 lecture meeting. Use the absence wisely.

Secondly, I want you to post summary reflections on Blackboard. These reflections should include commentary about the issues, films, discussions in class as well as at least one quote per chapter and articles from the readings for the week. Each weekly summary is worth 10% of your total grade. A total of 4 summary reflections will account for up to 40% of your grade.

The remaining 20% of your grade will be based on a final exam, in class on July 16.

Course Outline

All readings refer to online readings in the Blackboard folder for “Course Documents” or to one of the three books assigned for the class. Readings from the books are indicated with the authors name(s) in bold.

I) Introduction: Week 1

A) Sociology – Knowledge and Being in the Modern World

FILM

B) The Expansion of Capitalism

- Max Weber, Selection from “Politics as a Vocation” (first 11 pages)
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Bourgeois and Proletarians” from the Manifesto of the Communist Party (up to page 22).

C) Social Identity, the Self, and the Power of the Social:

- Berger & Luckmann, “Society as a Human Product”
- Mead, GH. “The Social Self” and “Social Attitudes and the Physical World”
- Milgram, “The Perils of Obedience”

Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Intro and Chapter 1

II) Authoritarianism: Denial and American History – week 2

What is meant by Authoritarianism?

A) Gender Socialization, Family Abuse, and the normalization of Violence:

- See Web Readings on Blackboard

Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Chaps 2-4

- Film – Tough Guise

B) Politics of Social Control:

Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Ch. 5

- Rosenhan, “On Being Sane in Insane Places”
- Schwartz, NYT on Iraq and Prison Experiments
- “The American Prison Crisis”
C) Race and Colonization

- Early European colonization and empires
- Race, Racism: Conquest and Slavery (Smedley/Smedley “Race as Biology is Fiction”)

Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Ch. 7

FILM

D) Poverty, Wealth and Power

III) The Consequences of Denial: Delusions of Nationalism and Empire – Weeks 3-4

A) Militarism and the Discourse of Punishment and Retribution (Week 3)

Johnson, Chalmers. The Sorrows of Empire. Chaps 1-2
Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Ch. 6 & 8

Film: Why We Fight

B) Media and Memory (week 3)

Johnson, Chalmers. The Sorrows of Empire. Chaps 3-6

Film: The Ad and the Ego

C) Ecology and Global Environmental Crisis (week 4)

Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Ch. 9 & Conclusion

D) Getting out of Denial (week 4)