

SOED-GE.2325: The Learning of Culture

Fall 2016, Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m. – 12:40 p.m.

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Office Hours: By appointment

This course examines the meaning and study of culture through a sociological lens. The course is structured around three primary questions. The first of these questions is: what does culture mean and how has it been studied? To examine this question, we look primarily to some of the classic – and some more contemporary – theorists in the field of sociology. The second question we examine in the course is: what is the relationship between culture and power? To explore this question, we examine a Marxian approach to power, then we investigate the work of Michel Foucault and the ways in which he reconceptualized power. The third question of the course is: in what ways has schooling become the site for cultural politics and identity-building? The final unit of the course approaches this question through a number of qualitative studies of schooling. The first goal of this course is to provide a solid, introductory grounding in some of the many ways in which the term *culture* has been used in the study of societies. The second goal is to raise questions about the relationship between culture and structures and to provide analytical tools to understand institutions (like schools) as sites of culture-building and cultural struggle.

GRADED REQUIREMENTS

- Class Participation: 20% of grade
- Weekly Reading Questions or Responses: 15% of grade
- Midterm paper: 25% of grade (due on Friday, October 28th at 4:00 p.m.)
- Final paper: 40% of grade (due on Wednesday, December 14th at 10:00 a.m.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES

1. *Office Hours*: I am happy to meet and am available by appointment. I also am regularly accessible by e-mail and by phone. I will make every effort to respond as promptly as possible to all e-mails. E-mail is always the best way to reach me.
2. *Class Attendance and Participation*: Class attendance is required for this course. If you must miss or arrive late to a class for any reason, please let me know in advance. I expect that everyone will participate in class discussion. I also expect that this participation will be based on an informed familiarity and thoughtful engagement with the assigned reading.
3. *Weekly Reading Questions or Responses*: Students have weekly reading questions or

responses due every Wednesday by 9:00 a.m., beginning on week three of the semester. You will have one week during the course of the semester – which you can choose – during which you do not need to submit a post (and you do not need to let me know about this week in advance). Please post approximately five questions or a 1-2 paragraph response to the week’s readings to the course NYU Courses site. You will not get credit for late submissions. To sign onto NYU Courses, sign onto your NYU e-mail account, go to the tab marked “Academics.” Under the “Course Sites” heading should be the “NYU Classes” tab. Click on our class tab in the “My Workspace” section on the top. Then, go to the “Forums” section (tabs on the left-hand side), then click on the week’s class date. Then click the “Start a New Conversation” tab at the top to add and submit your posting. I encourage you to read the questions/responses of others before you post your own – so that you can also include responses and/or follow-up questions. You are not responsible for responding to others, although you are encouraged to do so. Hopefully, having the questions/responses of others accessible to you on the website will be useful to your own thinking. The main goal of this assignment is for you to engage critically with the material and to come to class with a set of questions and responses guiding your exploration of the texts in the course. Response paragraphs can be engagements with any aspects of the reading. If you choose to submit reading questions: This kind of question asking is the goal of much academic work, and coming up with good questions that guide and shape your research is often the most difficult part of academic projects (like dissertations). I regard this as a substantive exercise. I am asking you to engage with the work and to really ask questions that provide purpose, that you leave the text with, and that you would like to discuss further.

4. *Papers*: Students have two papers due during the semester: a shorter midterm paper and a longer final paper. The short paper will be 5-7 pages (double-spaced, in 12-point font) and the longer essay will be 10-15 pages (double-spaced, in 12-point font). These are analytical essays that respond to the reading and the issues raised by the course. The topic for the midterm essay (due on Friday, October 28th at 4:00 p.m.) is: either (a) Choose two theorists whose work we have read in the first part of the course. Critically compare and contrast their understanding of culture (some aspect of its definition, its role, its relationship to structure, etc.); or (b) Choose a concept from the theory readings from the first half of the course that still confuses you. Write about it in a way that helps you understand it better. The topic for the final paper (due on Wednesday, December 14th at 10:00 a.m.) is: Apply the theoretical frameworks from the first half of the course to some issue of schooling addressed in the second half of the course. How do these theoretical understandings of culture help illuminate some aspect of schooling as a cultural institution or as a site for cultural contestation? In writing this final paper, you may also choose to substitute schooling for another cultural institution (like an aspect of media) that interests you. The goal for this paper is to help students integrate the various strands of the course, to encourage students to reflect on how social theory can shed light (or not) on issues of schooling that interest them.
5. *Proofreading, etc.*: All assignments should be thoroughly spellchecked and proofread

before they are submitted to me. Please allow time to do this before assignments are due. I reserve the right to lower grades on assignments that are turned in with excessive spelling, formatting, and other proofreading errors.

6. *Citation Style*: Please use APA style for your work. Please consult a manual for citation help. A good online resource can be found here: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
7. *Deadlines*: All paper deadlines are firm. *I will not grant extensions*, except in the case of absolute emergency. For each day that a paper is late, the final grade will be lowered by one- third of a grade (e.g., an A- becomes a B+ if a paper is one day late). *Papers are also considered late if they do not meet the time deadline* (e.g., a paper due at 4 p.m. is due *promptly* by 4 p.m.).
8. *Academic Integrity*: All students are responsible for understanding and complying with the NYU Steinhardt Statement on Academic Integrity. A copy is available at http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity
9. *Students with Disabilities*: Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation. Please see: <http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html>

REQUIRED READINGS

There are 9 required books for this course. Additional articles and chapters below will be made available over the course of the semester. The books are available at the campus bookstore. All books also are available on reserve at Bobst Library. These books (in the order in which we will read them) are:

Ta-Nehisi Coates. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.

Max Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Emile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press, 1915.

Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and its Discontents*. James Strachey (trans). New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961.

Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Alan Sheridan (trans). New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*. Robert Hurley (trans). New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

C. J. Pascoe. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Shamus Rahman Khan. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Amanda E. Lewis and John B. Diamond. *Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Please note: You will not be assigned any secondary sources on the theorists we encounter this semester. There are many good secondary analyses of their work. One to consider is: Anthony Giddens. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971. This is just suggested, not required, reading. If you would like recommendations for other secondary sources, please let me know.

COURSE OUTLINE

September 7: Course Introduction

September 14: What Is at Stake When We Talk about Culture (and Structures)?

Ta-Nehisi Coates. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.

September 21: The Sociological Tradition and the Question of Culture, Part I

Max Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

September 28: The Sociological Tradition and the Question of Culture, Part II

Emile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press, 1915. Introduction; Book 1, Chapter 1; Book 2, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 7; Conclusion.

October 5: What is Culture and How Do We Study It? The Psychoanalytic Tradition

Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and its Discontents*. James Strachey (trans). New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961.

October 12: YOM KIPPUR. NO CLASS.

October 19: What is Culture and How Do We Study it? Sociological Approaches

Ann Swidler. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51: 2 (April 1986): 273-286. PDF available on course NYU Classes site.

Pierre Bourdieu. "Structures and the Habitus." Pages 72-87 in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Richard Nice (trans). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. PDF available on course NYU Classes site. *Just read these pages: 72-87.*

October 26: Culture and Power: A Marxian Theoretical Framework

Karl Marx. "Manifesto of the Communist Party." Pages 335-362 in Robert C. Tucker (ed). *The Marx-Engels Reader*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1972. PDF available on course NYU Classes site. Please read "Manifesto of the Communist Party" sections I and II, pp. 14-27 in the text. Please stop reading when you get to section III., entitled "Socialist and Communist Literature."

Louis Althusser. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)." Pages 123-173 in Louis Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Ben Brewster (trans). 2nd ed. London: New Left Review Editions, 1977. Note: Only read the first part of this piece (pages 123-149). See <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>. In this online version, please read until you get to the section labeled "On Ideology."

November 2: Culture and Power: Foucault I

Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Alan Sheridan (trans). New York: Vintage Books, 1977. Part 1: Chapter 1 (pages 3-31), Chapter 2 (pages 47-63); Part 2: Chapter 1 (pages 73-94, 101-103), Chapter 2 (pages 114-116, 126-131); Part 3: Chapter 1 (pages 135-149, 167-169), Chapter 2 entire (pages 170-194), Chapter 3 entire (pages 195-228); Part 4: Chapter 1 (pages 231-235, 254-256), Chapter 3 entire (pages 293-308).

November 9: Culture and Power: Foucault II & Presidential Election Debrief

Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*. Robert Hurley (trans). New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

November 16: Culture and Schooling: Schools, Gender, and Sexuality

C. J. Pascoe. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

November 23: THANKSGIVING RECESS. NO CLASS.

November 30: Culture and Schooling: Power, Privilege, and Elite Schooling

Shamus Rahman Khan. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

December 7: Culture and Schooling: Persistence of Racial Inequality in Schools

Amanda E. Lewis and John B. Diamond. *Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

December 14: Class Wrap-Up