

**SYA 6018: Classic Sociological Theory**  
**Wednesdays 2:00–4:40 PM, SIPA 335, Fall 2025**

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**Course description**

This course provides a rigorous introduction to the genesis of sociological theory, broadly construed. Each week requires students to engage with a different thinker, examining key questions in relation to social research programs. While a diverse array of theorists will be covered here, all authors share one thing in common: each in their own way suggests that marginality, far from a contingent phenomenon, is inherent in the logic of modernity. But modernity, as we will see, has many possible conceptualizations, and we will encounter substantial disagreements over what modernity is, how it generates novel inequalities, and how these inequalities are reproduced over time. Throughout the course, students will gain experience working in multiple theoretical traditions, which will be considered in relation to their burgeoning research programs. While reading remains the primary task in this course, students are also expected to engage actively in class discussion, complete weekly memos, and submit an original research paper at the end of the term.

**Assignments and grading**

1. Discussion participation: 24%

You are expected to participate actively in seminar discussion. We only have twelve substantive meetings, so please do not miss class unless you absolutely must: if you are sick or in the case of an emergency. (Obviously if you are contagious, please do not put the rest of us at risk. I am always happy to accommodate extenuating circumstances via Zoom.) If you must miss class, please inform me in advance via email. I also expect you to have come to class having not only completed the reading assignment, but having thought about each text's argument, its applicability, and potential critiques. Failure to prepare effectively will inevitably lower your participation grade.

2. Reading memos: 36%

Before every class meeting, you must submit a one-page, single-spaced reading memo. The fact these are so short is what makes them so tough to write. The point is to extricate what you think is the key argument from the reading. This is an immensely difficult task precisely because these readings are so sweeping and often are not written specifically around a central thesis. Regardless, your task is to extract that central thesis, reconstructing the argument through key steps. These will come in handy later as reading notes. Please put effort into these. The task is not to dash off some immediate impressions or even a response; rather, you must recapitulate the central argument of the text and explain why it matters. These must be submitted before 10 am on the day of our class. No late memos will be accepted.

3. Final research paper: 40%

Each paper should be roughly 20 double-spaced pages, though I'm less concerned with word count than substance. Since this is a theory course, you are welcome to write a purely theoretical paper, drawing on readings from the class. Or if you would find it more productive, you are welcome to write about your potential dissertation topics in relation to theorists covered in class. I would urge you to begin thinking about possible paper topics

early in the semester. I am always available to meet to talk about possible ideas. In fact, I'd strongly suggest you meet with me to chat about your proposal. *Papers are due on Friday, December 12.*

### **Academic Misconduct**

Academic misconduct includes the following intentional acts or omissions:

- Cheating: The unauthorized use of materials, information, study aids, or assistance from another person on any academic assignment or exercise; assisting another student in the unauthorized use of any materials, information, study aids; having a substitute complete any academic assignment or completing an academic assignment for someone else, either paid or unpaid.
- Plagiarism: The use and appropriation of another's work without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student's own. Any student who fails to give credit for ideas, expressions, or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is guilty of plagiarism. Any student helping another to plagiarize may be found guilty of academic misconduct.
- Use of AI: No AI is to be used in producing material for this class. The point is to learn to digest difficult texts, and to grapple with constructing analytic synopses. AI will prevent you from realizing this goal. This includes using AI-empowered "polishing" tools. I'd much rather you submit something you *actually* wrote than deal with something generated by a server somewhere. Don't waste my time, and I won't waste yours. I will treat all AI use in this class as identical to plagiarism. If you're in doubt, please don't hesitate to ask me!
- Multiple submission: Submitting academic work for credit more than once.
- Penalties: Academic misconduct will be penalized in accordance with the Student Conduct and Honor Code. Any student suspected of academic misconduct may be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity (SCAI). The suggested minimum penalty for academic misconduct in this class is a zero for the assignment and a drop by a full letter grade on your final grade. Please note that this is a minimum penalty; egregious cases may result in an F in the course at my discretion.

### **SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND TOPICS**

#### **Week 1 (August 27): Introduction**

#### **Week 2 (September 3): Marx**

Karl Marx (1976 [1867]) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*. New York: Penguin, pp. 125-77, 247-80, 429-38, 762-802, 873-940.

#### **Week 3 (September 10): Du Bois**

W.E.B. Du Bois (2007 [1940]) *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

#### **Week 4 (September 17): Gramsci**

Antonio Gramsci (2021 [1934–35]) *Subaltern Social Groups: A Critical Edition of Prison Notebook 25*, edited by Joseph A. Buttigieg and Marcus E. Green. New York: Columbia University Press.

**Week 5 (September 24): Elias**

Norbert Elias (2000 [1939]) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Malden: Blackwell, pp. ix-xv, 5-43, 109-135, 257-362.

**Week 6 (October 1): Lefebvre**

Henri Lefebvre (1992 [1974]) *The Production of Space*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 1-168, 402-424.

**Week 7 (October 8): Foucault**

Michel Foucault (2010 [1978–79]) *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. New York: Palgrave, selections TBD.

**Week 8 (October 15): Fortunati**

Leopoldina Fortunati (2025 [1981]) *The Arcana of Reproduction: Housewives, Prostitutes, Workers, and Capital*. New York: Verso.

**Week 9 (October 22): Gilroy**

Paul Gilroy (1991 [1987]) *“There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack”: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Week 10 (October 29): Arrighi**

Giovanni Arrighi (1994) *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*. New York: Verso, selections TBD.

**Week 11 (November 5): Mamdani**

Mahmood Mamdani (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, selections TBD.

**Week 12 (November 19): Butler**

Judith Butler (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

**Week 13 (November 26): No class (Thanksgiving Break)**

**Week 14 (December 3): Wolfe**

Patrick Wolfe (2016) *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*. New York: Verso.