A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

--Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We are all entitled to our own opinions, but we are not entitled to our own facts.

--Leonard Pitts

INTRODUCTION

This course is intended to introduce you to some of the core and most controversial social problems in the U.S. today. Through the readings, films, lectures, and discussion, students will receive a substantive overview of the subjects covered, as well as learn how to analyze social problems from a critical and sociological perspective. Hopefully, the course material and classroom experiences will increase your social awareness and human empathy and teach you how to understand social issues through an informed and scientific lens.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

There will be 24 quizzes (117 pts; the lowest two quizzes you can drop/omit); 2 in-class exams (60 pts; midterm and final); 1 out-of-class analytical essay (20 pts; 5-pages/1.5 spaced in length, format provided); and up to 3 final points for excellent attendance and participation, for a total of 200 points possible. Students interested in earning more extra credit (assuming all required work is completed) have the option of attending local events (announced in class) throughout the semester (e.g. lectures, films, public programs, etc.) and writing a 2-3 page summary/reaction to the event.

Course grades will be determined by the following standard scale:

93–100% = A; 90–92% = A-; 88–89% = B+; 83–87% = B; 80–82% = B-; 78–79% = C+; 73–77% = C; 70–72% = C-; 68–69% = D+; 60–67% = D; 59% or below = F.

COURSE POLICIES

Class attendance is mandatory if you want to do well in this course and you are always expected to come to class prepared to take the quiz and discuss the assigned readings and subject matter for that day. However, whether you are absent or present, you still are responsible for whatever materials are assigned or presented in class, be they lectures, speakers, films, or handouts.

Taking make-up tests or submitting papers late without penalty will only be allowed in the event of an immediate, serious illness or personal emergency that physically prevents you from attending class. If such an emergency should take place, you must notify me in person or by
telephone/email before the end of the day of class, stating the problem and specifically when you will be in touch with me about making-up the assignment. No after-the-fact explanations or rationalizations will be allowed after that date—**NO EXCEPTIONS!**

If you are required, for a legitimate reason, to miss an upcoming class/test/assignment that you know about in advance, please see me beforehand. Failure to notify me beforehand about a missed written assignment or test will constitute an “unexcused late grade” and will result in a full grade reduction from the assigned grade for each class day (M-R) past the due date the paper is turned in or the test taken. (Keep in mind, however, that a late F paper/test is much better than earning a 0!) In other words, just like a job in the “real” world, show good judgement and responsibility toward your work and educational commitments.

This course will greatly educate you about our society and world today, but doing well in it will require strong attention to the basics for every class—careful reading and review, being prepared for class discussion, attentiveness, curiosity, and good note-taking in class, as well as excellent research, writing, and proofreading skills for your paper. Like anything else in life, you will get out of the class as much as you put into it and you will **earn** the grade you receive. Let’s all work together to make it a great class and learning experience!

**UNIVERSITY POLICY ON STUDENT DISABILITIES AND CONDUCT**

- Students with disabilities who wish to receive accommodations in this class should contact Disabilities Services at 865-2990 as soon as possible so that warranted accommodations can be implemented in a timely fashion. Disability Services are located in the Academic Resource Center, Monroe Hall 405.

- Students are expected to conduct themselves in the classroom in compliance with university regulations on civility, cheating and plagiarism. For information, see the university bulletin.

**MISCELLANEOUS CLASS POLICIES AND SUGGESTIONS:**

- It is a privilege to attend college and to learn. Take your education seriously and treat the classroom experience and your classmates with respect. Class is **NOT** the place to sleep, read the newspaper, study for other classes, or check your email or phone/text messages. Please turn off all cell phones and pagers, remove your hats/caps, and Laptops are **NOT** allowed in class.

- Arrive to class **on time** and do not begin packing up your belongings or stand up to leave until I dismisses the class. Please visit the restroom and water fountain **before** class starts. If you must leave the classroom before the end of class for an important reason, please let me know before class begins.

- If you bring a beverage can into class, take it out with you—along with any used paper— and **recycle** them in Loyola’s can/paper bins in the building. Please dispose of any other nonrecyclable trash around you in the trash can when you leave.

- Make sure you are technically proficient with the computer/software and printer that you choose to use for your written assignments. Failure to properly “save” your work or neatly print out your papers is not an acceptable excuse for turning in late work!
• Words are a beautiful thing so treat the English language with respect. Always take time to write thoughtfully, clearly, and proofread your writing many times—with a tutor or experienced writer if possible—before you turn in an assignment. Use the WAC lab or Academic Resource Center staff if you need assistance with your writing—as most students do.

• By the same token, think before you speak and be clear and articulate in your verbal communications. Avoid “mallspeak” and today’s street talk, e.g., filling up your communication interactions with empty words such as “like,” “uh,” “you know,” “whatever,” “cool,” “really,” etc. Say what you mean and mean what you say. For the rest of your life, people will judge you by what they first hear out of your mouth.

• Socrates said “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Formulate good questions about whatever you read or learn and ask them in class. The only “stupid” question is the one not asked.

• Do not cheat. It will only end in bitterness.

• If for any reason you find yourself having a problem with the class material, my teaching style, other students, or any other issue that is negatively affecting your enjoyment of the course, please make an appointment to come talk to me about your issues so we can try to solve them together, before your grade starts to suffer.

• Finally, read a newspaper every day, a good book every month or so, contemplate the world around you, and CARPE DIEM!!! (See the films “Dead Poets’ Society” and “Finding Forester” for some excellent academic role models.)

REQUIRED TEXT (available at Loyola Bookstore)


Note: You will need to bring your textbook with you to class everyday for reference and discussion purposes.

CLASS TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Date   Day   Class Topic and Readings

I. THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY ABOUT SOCIAL PROBLEMS

1/10   (M)   A. Course Introductions

1/12   (W)   B. Sociology as a Social Science and Social Lens

        Class Quiz: “Isn’t Sociology Just Common Sense?”
1/17 (M)  MARTIN LUTHER KING HOLIDAY--No Class

1/19 (W)  C. Developing a Sociological Imagination

D. Sociological Approaches to Social Problems

Reading: • “Introduction: Approaches to Social Problems,” pp. 1-14

II. CORPORATE POWER

1/24 (M)  A. Readings/Quiz:
    • Overview, pp. 17-19
    • R. McIntyre, “Tax Cheats and Their Inablers;” pp. 27-32

1/26 (W)  B. Readings/Quiz:
    • J. Luoma, “Water for Profit,” pp. 40-46

Film: “This Land is Our Land: The Fight to Reclaim the Commons”

III. ECONOMIC CRISIS

1/31 (M)  A. Readings/Quiz:
    • Overview, pp. 47-49
    • B. Ehrenreich, “Nickeled and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America, pp. 50-61

2/2 (W)  B. Readings/Quiz:
    • D. Russakoff, “Retirement’s Unraveling Safety Net,” pp. 72-78
    • R. Kuttner, “The Squandering of America,” pp. 79-82

Film: “Capitalism Hits the Fan: Richard Wolf on the Economic Meltdown”

IV. SOCIAL INEQUALITY

2/7 (M)  A. Readings/Quiz:
    • Overview, pp. 83-85
    • D. Baker, “Increasing Inequality in the United States,” pp. 86-90
    • Center for American Progress, “From Poverty to Prosperity: A National Strategy to Cut Poverty in Half,” pp. 91-97

2/9 (W)  B. Readings/Quiz:
    • D. Wessel, “As Rich-Poor Gap Widens in the U.S., Class Mobility Falls,” pp. 107-112

Film: “The End of Poverty”
V. RACISM

2/14  (M)  A. Readings/Quiz:  • Overview, pp. 113-115  
     • M. Brown et al., “The Roots of White Advantage,” pp. 116-121  

     • A. Chomsky, “They Take Our Jobs!,” pp. 134-140
     
     Film: “Tim Wise on White Privilege”

VI. SEXISM

2/21  (M)  A. Readings/Quiz:  • Overview, pp. 141-42  
     • The Economist, “The Conundrum of the Glass Ceiling,” pp. 143-149  
     • P. Orenstein, “Learning Silence,” pp. 165-172
     
     Film: “Killing Us Softly 4”

2/23  (W)  MID-TERM EXAM (covers all readings, lectures and films thus far)

VII. THE FAMILY

2/28  (M)  A. Readings/Quiz:  • Overview, pp. 175-176  
     • A. Skolnick, “Beyond the ‘M’ Word: Tha Tangled Web of Politics and Marriage,” pp. 177-185  
     • S. Lerner, “The Kids Aren’t Alright,” pp. 186-191


     Film: TBA

3/7-9  MARDI GRAS HOLIDAY—No Class

VIII. THE ENVIRONMENT

3/14  (M)  A. Readings/Quiz:  • Overview, pp. 199-201  
     • S. Lerner, “Diamond: A Struggle for Environmental Justice in Louisiana’s Chemical Corridor,” pp. 208-217
3/16 (W) B. Readings/Quiz: • Union of Concerned Scientists, “Smoke, Mirrors, & Hot Air: How ExxonMobil Uses Big Tobacco’s Tactics to Manufacture Uncertainty on Climate Science,” pp. 218-224

Film: “Six Degrees Could Change the World”

IX. WORK AND WELFARE

3/21 (M) A. Readings/Quiz: • Overview, 227-229
  • P. Hondagneu-Sotelo, “Domestica,” pp. 230-238
  • P. Edelman et al., “Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men,” pp. 239-246


Film: “Wage Slaves”

X. HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE

3/28 (M) A. Readings/Quiz: • Overview, pp. 271-273
  • The Commonwealth Fund, “Why Not the Best?: Results from the National Scorecard on U.S. Health System Performance, 2008,” pp. 281-288


Film: “Sicko”

XI. THE SCHOOLS

4/4 (M) A. Readings/Quiz: • Overview, pp. 295-296
  • J. Kozol, “The Shame of the Nation,” pp. 297-302
  • E. Mutari & M. Lakew, “Class Conflict: The Rising Cost of College,” pp. 303-308

  • J. Washburn, “Hired Education,” pp. 316-322

Film: TBA
XII. CRIME AND JUSTICE

4/11  (M)  A. Readings/Quiz: • Overview, pp. 323-324
          • J. Skolnick, “Wild Pitch: ‘Three Stikes, You’re Out’ and Other Bad
            Calls on Crime,” pp. 335-344

          353-363

        Film: TBA

4/18-25  EASTER/SPRING BREAK--No Class

XIII. AMERICA IN THE WORLD

4/27  (W)  A. Readings/Quiz: • Overview, pp. 373-374
          • C. Johnson, “Blowback,” pp. 375-384
          • M. Klare, “Oil, Geography, and War,” pp. 385-393

          ANALYTIC ESSAY PAPER DUE IN CLASS  (emailed papers not accepted)

5/2  (M)  B. Readings/Quiz: • The 9/11 Commission, “What to Do? A Global Strategy against
          Terrorism,” pp. 394-400

          Film: “Why We Fight”

5/4  (W)  Wrap-Up/Conclusions/Course Evaluations

5/11 (W)  FINAL EXAM, Wednesday, May 11th, 2:00-4:00pm
Analytical Essay Assignment

Drawing on all the assigned readings from Skolnick and Currie, as well as class lectures and films, compose a 5-page (1.5 spaced/10 pt. font) essay critically analyzing the following questions. Your paper will be graded on the quality of your writing, including grammar and spelling, as well as the quality/substance of your arguments and use of the readings and class materials at hand. The essay answers should be carefully proofread and the sources of all quotations, statistics, or author’s arguments properly cited at the end of a sentence—e.g. readings (Currie 2011: 327); or class lecture/handouts (Class Materials 2/7/11); or films (“The End of Poverty” 2/9/11).

Be sure and number your answers (as below), as well as the pages of your paper.

1) Discuss C. Wright Mills’ concept of the “Sociological Imagination” and how you are now better able to connect your own biographical/individual story to the wider social institutions and history of your society? How has this class helped you view your own personal attributes (e.g. your beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, privileges, assets, family, friendships, dreams, career aspirations, etc.) as products of the society, time, experiences, and social positions into which you were born, especially your race, class, gender, etc.? What does it mean to you now to understand that you live in a capitalist economic system and “plutocracy” and how is that system changing our society and culture? Given the trends and data you have studied, what do you see as the future of our economy and political system?

2) Discuss four (4) of the various social problems we’ve studied this semester that have surprised or impacted you the most. How has this course helped you think more critically about these social problems and issues than you did before? What are some of the social myths about these issues that you came into this class believing and how do you view them differently now? Moreover, how has your thinking about the causes of these social problems, as well as their impacts on people, changed over the course of the semester? Have any of your sympathies or level of empathy changed? How about your level of cynicism or mistrust toward core institutions or various elites in power?

3) M.K. Gandhi was once quoted as saying: “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” As you’ve learned, changing the society and world in which we live means much more than simply being more educated, aware, and concerned about the problems that we face—we also have to choose to act on what we know and care about. Drawing on the many course examples from the readings for inspiration, discuss at least five (5) specific social, economic, and political policies our society needs to adopt to help change some of the social problems we’ve studied this semester. What positive roles can you play to help bring these changes about? (Be sure and use the “I” form here and own your behavior!).