

**Society Through Film:
Social Change and Social Problems Through the Film Lens
Spring 2014 / MW 2:35pm / Tatarka Room
Dana Ahern / dsstudy@gmail.com
Office Hours Mondays 4:10p-5:10p & by Appointment**

Welcome to Society Through Film!

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is designed as an invitation to a discussion of social change and social problems from the sociological perspective. The primary goal of this course is to invite you to use your *sociological imagination* in the exploration, analysis and understanding of key social problems and the phenomenon of social change.

In this course we will examine central sociological concepts to help us understand society and social problems. We will then use these concepts as we read and watch a selection of case studies. We will work on expanding our critical thinking and reflection skills as we aim to better understand how your personal life experience interacts with larger social and historical forces. Lastly, we will also strive to understand: how social inequalities are organized; and how race, class, gender, sexuality and history shape our experiences as well as the broader social life.

This course will sometimes force us to confront some ugly and painful dimensions of social life and history. However, by engaging directly with these issues, we can imagine what a just and equal social world should look like and how we might contribute to making it a reality.

COURSE OUTLINE

We will use a three step process to learn about each social problem we address this semester:

- 1) We will watch filmed materials related to each social problem. This step will help us learn as best as possible in a classroom setting the real world issues faced by many people.
- 2) We will learn more about each social problem through assigned texts.
- 3) Instructor will facilitate class discussion regarding how to use the sociological perspective to understand social problems.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

Office Hours I welcome all visitors (even the canine ones:)! Please stop by for any reason, course-related or otherwise. One-on-one discussion of the material helps considerably and most likely will improve your grade. If you cannot make the Monday office hours, please contact me to make an appointment at another time.

Email Please email me if you have any questions and/or concerns about the course material or assignments. I may not always check email in the evenings or over the weekend but I will reply as soon as I can. Also, I will send course updates occasionally via email as well as the moodle website, so please be sure to *check your school registered email regularly*.

Classroom Environment I greatly look forward to the discussions we will have in this class, and I encourage honest dialogue and comments from everyone. At the same time, I expect you all to be respectful of your classmates' thoughts and feelings even if you disagree with one another. And please keep your comments succinct, insightful, and always intellectually connected to readings or previous discussions. Also, *please turn off your cell phones and laptop computers in class*.

Course Feedback I welcome comments and suggestions from you as we proceed with this class. While I cannot accommodate every request, I will take each into consideration. I will solicit feedback occasionally during the course, and if you have thoughts about how to improve or modify course organization, please be in touch with me.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

20% Class attendance and participation

Students are expected to attend all classes. You will learn more and earn a higher grade if you remain actively involved. By enrolling in this class, you agree to do each set of readings ****prior**** to the class in which we watch the film.

Your active participation in the class is my primary expectation. This includes coming to every class, engaging and participating during our class meetings, working collaboratively with your classmates, completing the reading assignments and written work by their due dates, bringing your books/readings to class, visiting my office hours when you have questions and/or concerns, investing yourself fully in the assignments, and keeping an open mind as we proceed through the course.

You should be asking questions, offering comments and exchanging your ideas regarding the material with your class mates and the instructor. If you do not do the readings, I end up doing all the talking and that is boring for everyone! Thus, do the readings and talk. This is your class, make it interesting. Do not be afraid to share what you think.

Class meetings will consist of watching films on Mondays and mini-lectures, discussions, small-group work, media presentations, and other activities on Wednesdays. You are responsible for staying up-to-date on all course material. This syllabus is our contract and signifies your and my commitment to meeting these expectations.

40% Four Short papers (10% per Paper)

You will be required to complete **4 two-page, double spaced papers (don't worry, no ICQ this time:-).** You will choose **1 paper topic of your choice from each unit.**

You will have a choice of questions based on the films and readings for each week. The questions for each week will be in the course pack as well as on moodle. The papers are due at the end each unit, on Friday of that week. Late papers will not be accepted.

For each paper, you have a rewrite option (only if you handed the paper in on time). Rewrites are due in class one week after the papers are returned. If you choose this option, you will receive the higher grade. You will have to come and talk to me in person before each rewrite.

25% Term Paper Details regarding the term project will be outlined in separate guidelines in the course pack. The term project will be discussed in class at the beginning of the semester as well as the end of the semester.

15% Term project class presentation Details regarding the term project presentation will be outlined in separate guidelines in the course pack. The term project presentation will be discussed in class at the beginning as well as the end of the semester.

SOCIOLOGY COURSE BACKGROUND

Perennial questions

How is society possible? What is the relationship of the individual to society and vice versa? What is the role of culture in society? Why is there inequality? How can we come to understand inequality? What is our relationship to the global society? What is the value and purpose of sociology? What should it be? *As we discuss these questions we will begin to uncover the society's underlying structures, we will begin to see from a new perspective that which we usually take for granted. We will see how social forces, consciously or unconsciously shape our lives.*

Cultural diversity

We will emphasize that all human values must be understood in a cultural context. Wherever possible, cross-cultural comparisons will be examined to point out the complex organization of the Slovak as well as American culture. *Appreciation of cultural differences fulfills one of the primary missions of any sociology course. This is to make people less self-righteous about the superiority of their own cultural beliefs and more aware of the complexity of the human existence. Class, race, gender and culture will be emphasized throughout the whole course.*

Historical perspective

In general, sociology explores how one's place in the larger social history shapes the consciousness of a private individual. *In other words we will attempt to understand how people's understanding of themselves and their societies shifts over time. In fact, sociology itself was a response to the transformations created by the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century.*

Methodology

A small section of this course will be devoted to understanding different methods sociologists use to study various social phenomena.

Writing and Research

In this course we will also pay attention to developing good research skills together with writing and analytical proficiency. At the beginning of the course we will devote some time to elaborating on and practicing what a research paper in sociology requires and how it is formed. *We will be working on developing critical thinking skills in order cultivate an understanding of what class readings present and most of all what they mean in the larger sociological context. No ideas will be accepted at face value; multiple points of view will be introduced and encouraged.*

Academic Honesty

You are responsible for adhering to the statement of academic honesty as outlined by your school.

Disability Statement

If you have a disability you would like me to know about so that I can make appropriate accommodations for you, please, let me know at the beginning of the semester.

Disclaimer

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, provided I give you fair and ample warning.

Society Through Film Semester at a Glance

TOPICS SCHEDULE

Unit One: The Sociological Approach to Social Problems

17 th 19 th Feb	Week 1: The Sociological Perspective and The Study of Social Problems	
24 th 26 th Feb	Week 2: Sociological Inquiry	FILM: ROSHOMON (1950)
3 rd 5 th Mar	Week 3: Impact and Importance of Social Research	FILM: KINSEY (2004)

Unit Two: Social Movements and Advocacy for Social Change

10 th 12 th Mar	Week 4: Sexuality and Civil Rights	FILM: MILK (2009)
17 th 19 th Mar	Week 5: Health, Advocacy and Civil Rights	FILM: HOW TO SURVIVE A PLAGUE (2012)
24 th 26 th Mar	Week 6: Velvet Revolution and Regime Change	FILM: KOLYA (1996)

Unit Three: Globalization and the Environment

31 st 2 nd Apr	Week 7: Globalization	FILM: SAMSARA (2011)
7 th 9 th Apr	Week 8: Climate Change	FILM: AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH (2006)

Unit Four: Family and Modern Society

14 th 16 th Apr	Week 9: Marriage	FILM: MONSOON WEDDING (2006)
21 st 27 th Apr	Week 10: READING WEEK	

28 th 30 th Apr	Week 11: Family	TV: MODERN FAMILY // THE FOSTERS // GG
5 th 7 th May	Week 12: Intellectual Disability	FILM: MR. BLUE SKY (2007)
12 th 14 th May	Week 13: Physical Disability	FILM: THE UNTOUCHABLES (2011)

End of Term Student Presentations

19 th -21 st May	Week 14: Student presentations
26 th -28 th May	Week 15: Student presentations // Last class

Important Due Dates

SHORT PAPERS

!Submit on Moodle!

Friday 7 th March 2014	9pm
Friday 28 th March 2014	9pm
Friday 11 th April 2014	9pm
Friday 16 th May 2014	9pm

TERM PAPER

!Submit in class!

Wednesday 28 th May 2014	Last day of class
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TERM PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

19 th , 21 st , 23 rd May 2014	In class
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REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS from:

- * Charon, J.M. [ed] Social Problems: Readings with Four Questions. Belmont, CA, 2012.
- * Berger, P.L. Invitation to Sociology. NY: Anchor Books, 1963.
- * Gusfield, J.R. Contested Meanings: The Construction of Alcohol Problems. Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
- * Harding, S. The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader. NY and London: Routledge, 2004.
- * Bowel, T. Feminist Standpoint Theory. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/>
- * Heider, Karl. "The Rashomon Effect. American Anthropologist 90(1), 1988, pp. 73-81.
- * Kvale, S. Interviews: Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing. London: Sage, 1996.
- * Mestel, R. The Kinsey Effect. LA Times, Nov 15, 2004. <http://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/usa/usnews112.htm>
- * Bancroft, J. 50th Anniversary Lecture on the Kinsey Institute Today. Indiana University, 1997.
<http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/about/jb-50lecture.html#contents>
- * Blumer, H. G. "Collective Behavior." In Principles of Sociology (3rd), edited by Alfred McClung Lee. NY: Barnes and Noble Books, pp. 65-121. 1969.
- * Romano, R.C.; Raiford, L. [eds.] The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2006.
- * Jennings, M.K., Anderson, E.A. "The Importance of Social and Political Context: The Case of AIDS Activism." Political Behavior 25(2), June 2003, pp. 177-199.
- * On Samsara The Film: <http://samsarafilm.wordpress.com/>
- * Sapp, S. Global Climate Change: Fact or Myth? <http://www.soc.iastate.edu/sapp/soc235gw.html>
"Before and After: the Phenomenon of Czechoslovakia's 'Velvet' Revolution in Narratives by its 'Youngest Witnesses". Sociológia - Slovak Sociological Review. Volume 42, 2010, No. 6: 671-690.
- * Nanda, Serena. "Arranging a Marriage in India" in Stumbling Towards Truth. Philip de Vita, ed. Prospect Heights: IL: Waveland. 2000. 196-204.
- * Fox, B. Yiu. J. "As Times Change: A Review of Trends in Personal and Family Life." In Family Patterns, Gender Relations (3rd ed), edited by Bonnie Fox. NY: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 180-208.
- * Barnes, Mercer, Shakespeare. "Understanding Disability." In Exploring Disability: A Sociological Introduction. Polity Press, 1999. pp. 10-38.
- * Parmenter, T. "Intellectual Disabilities: Quo Vadis?" In Handbook of Disability Studies, edited by Albrecht, Seelman, Bury. Sage: 2001, p. 267.