

## **SOCIOLOGY'S HISTORICAL IMAGINATION: A SURVEY**

190.001

KAREN BARKEY  
Barrows Hall 436  
Barkey@Berkeley.edu

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This is an introductory survey in Historical Sociology. Historians and historical sociologists have long attempted to reconstruct the past. In this endeavor, they use a variety of evidence that is left behind from previous times. They use and shape this evidence to make convincing arguments about how processes, events and practices unfolded over time. The processes and events they attempt to explain can be as varied as the construction of race and racism, the rise of capitalism, the French Revolution or social practices of medieval society. This course will focus on the reconstruction of the past, the manner in which history and sociology approach the past, the problems encountered with evidence and the different ways of reconstructing the past. We will survey different approaches to using the past as well as tackle substantive issues of interest to politics and society in contemporary society.

### **Course Requirements**

*This course requires attendance, participation in class discussion, 6 short assignments and one longer paper.*

Students are required to keep up with the readings and be prepared for class discussion. **Class attendance and participation will count as 20% of the grade.**

Students will be asked to prepare one lengthy paragraph for 6 weeks of readings (out of 13 weeks) that they choose. Each student should complete 6 assignments by the end of the semester. The paragraph should not be more than 300 words—and should be thought of as a comment, a dissent, or an elaboration on a question in the readings. Please post your comments on the bCourses site for our class. For example, if you are doing a mini report on Islam Observed, I expect your paragraph on September 21st. If you are doing your comment on a set of articles, I will announce in class which set to concentrate on. I see these mini reports as a way to engage you in the readings and have you use your own historical understandings and sensitivities to think through them before we engage them analytically in class. I will read each comment before class and return them to you after we have a discussion. You are responsible for keeping track of 6 assignments.

**These reports will count as 30% of the grade.**

Students will be asked to write one longer paper-- 20-25 pages -- due at the end of the term. The topic of this paper will be decided in consultation with the instructor. I urge

you to think about paper ideas after the first couple of weeks of the term, once we have established some basic principles and gone through a few discussions on how we reconstruct the past. I will follow your work on the paper and be available to consult as we go through the semester. The paper will be due December 10. This final paper will count as 50% of the grade.

The following books will be available for purchase at the Bookstore:

Flaubert's Parrot by Julian Barnes

Islam Observed by Clifford Geertz

The Cheese and the Worms by Carlo Ginzburg

Between Dignity and Despair by Marion Kaplan

Books available for purchase are all paperback. Articles will be online on the course site.

## **Weekly Readings**

### **Section I**

#### *Introduction & Recapturing the Past*

This is a general introduction to the fields of history, sociology and historical sociology. What are their goals? Are their differences in the way they approach the past?

August 25 & September 1

Philip Abrams, "History, Sociology, Historical Sociology," Past and Present 87 (1980): 3-16

Terrence J. McDonald, ed., The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences, chapter by Craig Calhoun.

James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, "Comparative Historical Analysis: Achievements and Agendas," pp 3-38 in Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences ed., J. Mahoney & D. Rueschemeyer (Cambridge U. Press 2003).

#### *Recapturing the Past*

This week you read a wonderful novel by Julian Barnes whose protagonist is trying to reconstruct the life of the novelist Gustave Flaubert. In each of the chapters he runs into problems and complications that we as historians and sociologists would as well, and he discusses them in a light and entertaining fashion. This is a quick read and a nice introduction to the field.

September 8

Julian Barnes, Flaubert's Parrot .

### **Section II**

*Reconstructing Causes and Conditions*

For a long part of its existence as a subfield of sociology, historical sociology has been concerned with the initial conditions and the causes for phenomena under investigation. The first article differentiates between Weberian and Durkheimian strategies for getting at the causes of phenomena and the second article discusses the French historian Marc Bloch's use of comparisons in his studies.

September 15

Charles C. Ragin & David Zaret, "Theory and Method in Comparative Research: Two Strategies," Social Forces 61 (1983):731-54

William Sewell, "Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History," History and Theory 6 (1967): 208-18.

*Reconstructing Causes and Conditions*

This week we read a book that compares Morocco and Indonesia in their respective trajectories of incorporating Islam into their societies and cultures. Geertz shows that despite the introduction of the same religion, the differences in the trajectories of the two countries can be explained by the differing cultural and geographic foundations of these places.

September 22

Clifford Geertz, Islam Observed.

**Section III**

*Reconstructing Events*

An event is a historically singular happening and events unfold in a sequential manner. We have to think about both the uniqueness of the event as Sewell describes in the Bastille Day article, as well as find the general character and the cultural significance of the event.

September 29 and October 6\*

Ron Aminzade, "Historical Sociology and Time," Sociological Methods and Research 20 (1992): 459-80.

Larry J. Griffin, "Temporality, Events and Explanation in Historical Sociology," Sociological Methods and Research 20 (1992): 403-427.

Andrew Abbott, "Conceptions of Time and Events in Social Science Methods," Historical Methods 23 (1990): 140-150.

William H. Sewell, "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," Theory and Society 25/26 (1996): 841-881.

**Section IV**

*Reconstructing Narratives*

Narratives, as stories that people tell, provide us with a rich, yet also flawed, source of information about the manner in which people make sense of their lives. Narratives order and link events into patterns and they are very useful to reconstructing the past since they are everywhere. They can be political accounts, personal histories and biographies, memoirs, and oral histories. In this section, with the poignant book by Marion Kaplan on the making a Jewish and gendered identity, we will pay attention to a type of narrative that is about social identity and relates the story of identity-in-the making.

October 13

Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce and Barbara Laslett, Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History, pp. 1-70.

William H. Sewell, Jr., "Narratives and Social Identities," Social Science History 16 #3 (1992).

October 20

Marion Kaplan, Between Dignity and Despair

## Section V

### *Reconstructing Practices*

In this section of the course we will look at the ways in which we can reconstruct the practices of individuals, societies and civilizations. With the Cheese the Worms we have an example of a miller, Menocchio, in 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy who dares to question the social and religious practices of the Church and is persecuted by the Inquisition.

October 27

Readings from Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu.

"Civilization," in Elias, On Civilization, Power, and Knowledge. Ed. Stephen Mennel and Johan Goubsbloum (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1998), pp. 49-106

Craig Calhoun, "Habitus, Field, and Capital," in Critical Social Theory, 132-61

November 3\*

Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms

## Section VI

### *Reconstructing Relations*

This section is about rethinking the past in terms of transactions, social ties, interactions and networks of social relations. It takes off from Simmel's classic insight on intergroup networks that connect people and institutions. We will have an exemplary piece by Charles Tilly and then a more methodological article. We finish with perhaps the most cited article in networks.

November 10

Charles Tilly, "Micro, Macro, or Megrim?" in Mikrogeschichte, Makrogeschichte: komplementär oder inkommensurabel? Gribaudi, Levi and Charles Tilly (Wallstein Verlag, 1998).

Barry Wellman & S. D. Berkowitz, "Studying Social Structures," &  
Barry Wellman "Structural Analysis: From Method and Metaphor to Theory and  
Substance" in Social Structures: A Network Approach (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,  
1988)

Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," AJS 6 (1973):1360-1380.

November 17

Conclusions and Paper Discussions

December 1

Paper Discussions