Soc201B: Modern Social Theory  
Spring 2023. Wednesdays 4-6pm. 402 Social Sciences  
Prof. Mara Loveman  
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Office Hours: Thursdays 1-3pm, 466 Social Sciences or via zoom

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“How a problem is framed is already 9/10 of the battle”  
--Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past, 1995 [2013]

This course is the second of two required theory courses for first-year doctoral students in Sociology at UC Berkeley. In the first course, Classical Sociological Theory (201A), students are introduced to the major figures who have historically comprised the classical sociological canon, while also problematizing the exclusivity of the canon and raising questions about why sociology has a canon at all. In this second course, Modern Social Theory, we take up these latter questions directly, and several more: Why do we require graduate students to take “theory”? What is theory, anyway? Where does theory come from? Who produces it? What counts as theory, and who decides? What’s theory (good) for?

While there remains a remarkable amount of consensus about what and who belongs on a “classical” theory syllabus, there is much less consensus about this when it comes to modern or contemporary theory. There are many ways to approach a class like this one. In this seminar, we will grapple directly with the implications of the choices we make in selecting our theoretical foundations (and in so doing, constructing our own past, and directing/constraining our present work). We will discuss the questions and themes and concepts that have conventionally anchored modern sociological theory syllabi (sociology, as it is); questions and themes and concepts that might have become central to the discipline if our predecessors had chosen alternative sources as anchors for our disciplinary origins and purpose (sociology, as it might have been); and questions and themes and concepts that might yet become the basis and the impetus to a sociology relevant to the world we find ourselves in at present, looking toward an uncertain future (sociology, as it could be).

The Haitian-born historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes that “how a problem is framed is already 9/10 of the battle.” Social theory can illuminate; it can also obscure. Theories and the concepts from which they are built can make things thinkable in ways that generate questions we might not otherwise ask, and inspire lines of research we might not otherwise pursue. Theories can also render certain things unthinkable in ways that keep us from asking questions we could be asking, and from pursuing lines of research that we arguably should pursue. In this seminar, we will read and engage with a broad range of theorists with an eye to what they illuminate and bring into focus, and to what they obscure and relegate to the background. And we will consider how the constitutive concepts and questions, foci and omissions, of work we
describe as “theory” shape the practice of sociology today, as well as our imaginings about what other sociologies might be possible.

Expectations

Students are expected to do three things over the course of the semester:

1. Read assigned texts prior to our weekly meeting and come prepared to discuss them.

2. Write a brief memo in reaction to the reading each week and post it to our shared bcourses site by 5pm on Tuesday (absolute maximum one page/500 words).

3. Write a short paper that either: (1) puts at least two authors from the syllabus into conversation or argument with one another about a topic of your choice; or (2) brings an author not included on the syllabus into discussion or argument with one or more authors on the syllabus, on a topic of your choice. The paper should be ~10 pages and is due anytime on or before the last day of finals weeks (May 14).

More details about the writing assignments will be provided in class.

Reading

All required reading for the class will be available on the bcourses site.
Schedule

1/18. on sociology/theory

as it is, might have been, could be

introduction.

1/25. on the question of where to begin

politics of histories, and the present-ness of the past


Recommended


*Calhoun, Craig. Introduction to *Contemporary Sociological Theory*.

2/1. what if we start here:

the question of freedom, or “How we get free”


Or, here:


**2/8. on primitive accumulation, capitalism, alienation, agents of history:** viewed from slavery’s aftermath, the colonies, the burning stake


*Recommended*


**2/15. Hegemony and racial domination**
*Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (3-23; notes on 56 and 80; 123-133; 229-245; 257-265; 321-322, [323-343 optional])


*Burawoy, Michael. “Cultural Domination: Gramsci Meets Bourdieu” in *Conversations with Bourdieu*.


*Recommended*

*DuBois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction*


2/22. “total” domination and its antitheses?


*Orwell, George. 1936. “Shooting an Elephant” *New Writing*.


*Dubois. “Human Rights for All Minorities” (1945) Given as a speech in 1945 at a meeting of the East and West Association*
Recommended

3/1. colonial domination
   colonial resistance

* Fanon. F. Black Skin, White Masks (Introduction and Ch.1). New York: Grove Press.


* Bhabha, Homi. Forward to The Wretched of the Earth


Recommended

* Ch. 5 of Black Skin, White Masks

* Sartre, Jean-Paul. Preface to The Wretched of the Earth


3/8. settler colonialism and decoloniality
   the promise and the violence of inclusion


* Lugano, Maria. “Coloniality of Gender” Worlds and Knowledge Otherwise, Spring 2018.


Recommended:


3/15. individual/subject, power/discipline

*Foucault, Michel. “Subject and power”*


3/22. biopower and governmentality and arts (and crafts) of evasion

*Foucault, Michel “”We Other Victorians” (p.3-13) and “Right of Death and Power over Life” pp. 134-159 in *History of Sexuality* vol.1. Pantheon Books 1978.

*Foucault, Michel. “Governmentality.” Pp. 87-104 in *The Foucault Effect*.


*Mbembe, Achile. *Necropolitics*. Public Culture. [and see interview on the pandemic]


**Recommended**

*Scott, James. *The art of not being governed*

*Kelley, Robin. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*


3/29. spring recess.

4/5. symbolic domination materiality of representation


*Butler, Judith. “Merely Cultural”


*Mora, Cristina. Making Hispanics [selections]

Recommended


4/12. on education as domination/liberation
   states of mind, minds and bodies of state

*Bourdieu, Pierre. “Rethinking the State” (on “minds of state”)

*Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed (selections).

*Burawoy, Michael. “Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Freire Meets Bourdieu”


Recommended

*Carles, Pierre. Sociology is a combat sport (movie)
4/19. on freedom as a constant struggle  
within/against/beyond the university  


Kelley, Robin. “Black Study, Black Struggle” Ufahamu  

*Harvey, Stefano and Fred Moten “The University and the Undercommons” In The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study Minor Compositions 2013.  


4/26. on sociology/theory for the present  
which past? whose future?  

*Garminder, Bhambra. “Sociology for an ‘Always-Already’ Global Age” ch.7 in Connected Sociologies.  


*Burawoy. 2005. “Conclusion: Provincializing the Social Sciences”  


*Trouillot, R. Conclusion to Silencing the Past.  

Recommended  


5/3: rrr week: meetings about papers  

5/10: Finals week – no class. Final paper due May 12 @ 5pm.