

Sociology 321, Survey of Sociological Theory, Section 1, CRN 73324
Fall 2011, TR 0130-0245p KUY 307
Professor: Sun-Ki Chai, office hours TTh 12:30-1:30, Saunders 237
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Theory is perhaps the part of sociology that seems most difficult to understand for the average student. What exactly do social theorists study, and how does it relate to real life? Basically, the answer is that theorists study the same thing that all sociologists study: social phenomena such as poverty, democracy, war, crime, education, health, and ethnicity. The main difference between "regular" sociologists and theorists is that theorists try to look at the big picture. Rather than starting off by analyzing a particular society or point in time, they try to see if there are any general rules of human existence that can be said to apply throughout the world and across history. Because of this, their writings can often be more abstract than those of other sociologists. Nonetheless, their main purpose is far from abstract, but rather based on a desire to understand the real world. Indeed, sociological theory is useless unless it helps us to explain or predict events in our own lives and the lives of those around us. Good theories are not useful just for intellectual purposes; they should also provide us with hints for how we can live better.

This course will attempt to teach you about sociological theory in a way that allows you to see how theories are applied to understanding reality. It will therefore include discussion not only of the theories themselves, but also examples of how they are used in a practical manner to address issues that affect us all in our everyday lives.

The course texts are George Ritzer's *Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classical Roots: The Basics*, 3rd ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2009), ISBN-13: 978-0073404387 and Michael Hechter and Christine Horne's *Theories of Social Order: A Reader*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, 2009), ISBN-13: 978-0804758734. Both should be available at the UH bookstore. Ritzer's textbook provides a general summary of both 19th century "classical" and more recent "contemporary" theory. It is a fairly quick and concentrated read, and is designed to make learning a relatively painless process. Hechter and Horne's reader offers excerpts of writings directly from many of these theories. Some of the articles in the reader are fairly difficult and abstract, but we will try very hard to help clarify things in the lecture. There will be no reading assignment until second week of class.

There are a number of regular, small, writing assignments in this course. During the semester, students will be expected to write several short essays at regular intervals, which will be based on the lectures and readings, as well as an article that you have chosen from outside the assigned material. The essays in total will be worth 50% of your grade.

The course requirements also include a take-home final paper. The final will count for 25% of your grade. It will be based upon essay questions, and will cover both the material presented in the lectures and in the assigned readings, as well as a testing your ability to do original analysis of the theories we have covered.

Attendance will be taken in the course, and will make up a large 25% of the grade. This percentage is based upon the assumption that the vast majority of students will attend nearly all classes. Students who arrive substantially after class begins or who leave before class ends will receive partial credit for attendance. Finally, up to 5% extra credit can be given for your constructive participation in class discussions. Note: This syllabus may be subject to small changes, but this will happen only with the agreement of the majority of the class.