

The Sociological Imagination: Exploring the Micro-Macro Link

SOC 396H1S – LEC0201 – Winter 2017

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PREREQUISITE: The prerequisite to take this course is a 200 or higher level SOC course. Students without this requirement will be removed at any time discovered and without notice.

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their interconnections within a society has completed its intellectual journey.

C. Wright Mills (1959)

COURSE SYNOPSIS:

In his classic work, *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills affirms that the primary task of social science is to render the life experiences of individuals comprehensible by relating them to the socio-historical contexts in which they live—what Mills called the “intersections” of **Biography**, **Social Structure**, and **History**. The main thematic concerns of our course will accordingly be directed towards exploring the complex interrelations between individual actors and the diverse social worlds within which they originate, function, and continuously transform through their ongoing practices and projects. Institutions, roles and statuses, worldviews, norms of personhood, class hierarchies and systems of domination, collective behaviour and social movements—all this must be attended to, integratively and dynamically, if we are to illuminate and comprehend the linkages between the personal and the public, the local and global. As Mills viewed the “Sociological Imagination” as a mode of rigorous inquiry into the diverse and changing limits and possibilities for human freedom, we will also investigate the extent to which the historical forces and social conditions that shape ourselves and our worlds are largely within, or beyond, our rational control.

TEXTS:

Selected Readings, to be made available on Blackboard.

Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.

Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

REQUIREMENTS and GRADING:

One thematic **essay**, approximately 3000 words in length (40%);

Three **in-class tests**, to be pace scheduled (50%);

One short **film report** (10%)

Academic Integrity is fundamental to learning at UofT. Familiarize yourself with the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, at (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>) . It is the University rule book for academic behaviour, and you are expected to know the rules.

Plagiarism Policy: Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to *Turnitin.com*, for the detection of possible plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such papers. You are advised to consult the Rules and Regulations section of the UofT Annual Calendar regarding this matter.

Email policy: Owing to the large number of suspect/junk mailings I receive, I do not favor using this medium for class communication, other than for emergencies. My preference is for you to contact me in class for all course-related matters.

Missed Tests: For students with officially legitimate reasons and documentable proof for absences on test days, the policy will be to double the score on the following test.

Policy on Extension Requests: Extensions for completing course assignments can only be given in accordance with university rules, which are limited to medical situations or family emergencies. Documentation will be required to establish compliance. NOTE: Late papers without such documentation will not be accepted, and scored as '0' pts.

DOCUMENTATION FROM YOUR PHYSICIAN OR COLLEGE REGISTRAR

If you miss a test or a paper deadline, **do not** contact the instructor or a TA prior to completing the steps described here. In case of **illness**, you must supply a duly completed **Verification of Student Illness** or Injury form (available at www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca). A doctor's note is not acceptable. **The form must be placed in a sealed envelope, addressed to the instructor, and submitted with your work** at class or to your TA during their office hours. If a **personal or family crisis** prevents you from meeting a deadline, you must get a letter from your college registrar (it is a good idea anyway to advise your college registrar if a crisis is interfering with your studies). **The letter must be placed in a sealed envelope, addressed to the instructor, and submitted with your work** at class or to your TA during their office hours.

Accessibility Services: If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.

WRITING ASSISTANCE

Students can find information about college writing centres at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science>. It is recommended that you **book appointments well in advance**, as the Writing Centres are commonly very busy. See also the website Writing at the University of Toronto at www.writing.utoronto.ca. For numerous practical advice files, see www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice.

Information about the English Language Learning program (ELL) is available at <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>. There is also Reading eWriting, an online program that helps students engage course readings more effectively.

WINTER TERM 2017

1. Jan. 5 *Introduction: Contexts, Connections, and the "Sociological Imagination"*

Musical prelude: "Riders on the Storm" by *The Doors*

Reading: Simon Critchley blog post on Heidegger's '*Being and Time*' (3 pgs) On Blackboard

2. Jan 12 ***Micro and Macro, or Dialectical Totality?***
Securing Our Ontological Foundations: The Nominalism – Social Realism Debate

Readings: Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, chap. 1, "The Promise" (5 pgs.);
Francis Bacon, "Idola Mentis" (7 pgs) On Blackboard

3. Jan 19 ***Securing Our Ontological Foundations (cont.)***

Readings: Karl Marx, selected readings on "Historical Materialism" (5 pgs);
Erving Goffman, "The Interaction Order" (17 pgs.) On Blackboard.

4. Jan 26 ***Social Structures and the Genesis and Constitution of Selves***

*** ***Quiz #1*** ***

Readings: Goffman, *Stigma*, chapter 1, "Stigma and Social Identity."
Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*: "Introduction" and 1, "Nightmare."

5. Feb 2 ***Social Structures and the Genesis and Constitution of Selves (cont.)***

Readings: Herbert Marcuse: Selection from *Eros and Civilization* (5 pgs) On Blackboard
Malcolm X: 2, "Mascot" and 3, "Homeboy."

6. Feb 9 ***Social Structures and the Genesis and Constitution of Selves (cont.)***

Readings: Malcolm X: 4, 5, and 6, "Laura," "Harlemite," and "Detroit Red."
Goffman, chapter 2, "Information Control and Personal Identity" [only up to page 73,
"Passing"].

7. Feb 16 ***Exploring the Agency-Structure Dialectic***

*** ***Quiz #2*** ***

Readings: Malcolm X: chapters 7 through 10, "Hustler," "Trapped," "Caught," and "Satan."
Goffman, chapter 2, "Information Control and Personal Identity" [from page 73 to 104].

*** February 20-24

READING WEEK

8. Mar 2 *Exploring the Agency-Structure Dialectic (cont.)*

*** *Film Report Due* ***

Readings: Malcolm X: chapters 11 through 14, “Saved,” “Savior,” “Minister Malcolm,” and “Black Muslims.”

9. Mar 9 *Exploring the Agency-Structure Dialectic (cont.)*

Readings: Malcolm X: chapters 15 through 17, “Icarus,” “Out,” and “Mecca.”
Goffman, chapter 3, “Group Alignment and Ego Identity”

10. Mar 16 *On Macro-Structural Transformations*

Readings: Malcolm X: “On Afro-American History” (30 pgs) On Blackboard
Malcolm X: chapters 18 and 19, “El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz” and “1965.”
Goffman, chapter 4, “The Self and Its Other.”

11. Mar 23 *On Macro-Structural Transformations (cont.)*

*** *Quiz #3* ***

Readings: Malcolm X: Alex Haley, Epilogue. Ossie Davis: On Malcolm X.
Goffman, chapter 5, “Deviations and Deviance.”

12. March 31 *Mills Revisited and Affirmed:
On Integrating Biography, Social Structure, and History*

*** *Essay Due* ***

The powers of ordinary people are circumscribed by the everyday worlds in which they live, yet even in these rounds of job, family, and neighborhood they often seem driven by forces they can neither understand nor govern. Great changes are beyond their control, but affect their conduct and outlook none the less. The very framework of modern society confines them to projects not their own, but from every side, such changes now press upon the men and women of the mass society, who accordingly feel that they are without purpose in an epoch in which they are without power.

C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (1956:3)

The more we understand what is happening in the world, the more frustrated we often become, for our knowledge leads to feelings of powerlessness. We feel that we are living in a world in which the citizen

has become a mere spectator or a forced actor, and that our personal experience is politically useless and our political will a minor illusion.

Very often, the fear of total permanent war paralyzes the kind of morally oriented politics, which might engage our interests and our passions. We sense the cultural mediocrity around us- and in us- and we know that ours is a time when, within and between all the nations of the world, the levels of public sensibilities have sunk below sight; atrocity on a mass scale has become impersonal and official; moral indignation as a public fact has become extinct or made trivial. We feel that distrust has become nearly universal among men of affairs, and that the spread of public anxiety is poisoning human relations and drying up the roots of private freedom.

We see that people at the top often identify rational dissent with political mutiny, loyalty with blind conformity, and freedom of judgment with treason. We feel that irresponsibility has become organized in high places and that clearly those in charge of the historic decisions of our time are not up to them. But what is more damaging to us is that we feel that those on the bottom- the forced actors who take the consequences- are also without leaders, without ideas of opposition, and that they make no real demands upon those with power.

C.Wright Mills

From a speech delivered at a conference in Ontario,
in 1954, for the CBC

*Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's
opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.* Oscar Wilde