

CONF 803

MACRO THEORIES/THEORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Semester: Spring 2009
Class Time: Thursdays, 4:30-7:10
Class Room: Truland 647
Instructor: Terrence Lyons
703/993-1336
tlyons1@gmu.edu

Welcome to the course. This seminar explores theories on the nature of social conflict and processes of social change. We will critically assess a range of theories from a variety of disciplines that speak to these issues. One main representative text will be discussed and examined critically each week with the goal of understanding and assessing the theory on its own terms as well as in comparison to other theories.

The course will be run as a seminar with an emphasis on in-depth discussion. It is therefore imperative that students read the assigned books prior to class. Active participation in class discussions will be expected. The purpose of the required short papers (see details below) is in part to encourage you to develop your thoughts regarding the readings prior to class and to be prepared to engage in the discussion. Even for those weeks that the student does not write a paper, a thoughtful reading of the text is necessary to contribute to the discussion and to include that theory in the student's final, integrative paper.

Requirements:

Participation:

This is a doctoral seminar, not a lecture course. My role is to facilitate and guide discussion. Your active participation is essential to the success of the course and you will benefit from the discussion to the extent that you have completed the readings and come to class prepared to discuss them.

In recognition of the importance placed on participation in classroom discussions, 10 percent of the total grade will reflect a student's participation. Participation grades will be based on frequency and quality of your involvement in each week's class, with an emphasis on the latter. You are not encouraged to speak on every topic simply for the sake of participating but rather are strongly encouraged to find opportunities to contribute in ways that advance and deepen the discussion. Missing more than one or two classes will inevitably reduce your overall participation and hence result in a lower participation grade.

In evaluating participation, I will look for evidence that you have done the readings with sufficient attention that you can contribute to the discussion. An ability to succinctly

summarize what you have read is regarded as a given. In order to further the discussion you should be prepared to offer your opinions on an author's argument: Do you find it convincing? If so why? If not, why not? Is it clearly presented? Is it logical? Do you find the use of evidence compelling? How would you further test the argument to confirm its validity? Do you think that the argument works better for some cases than others?

If you can demonstrate that you know what you have read, have thought about it, and can articulate an opinion on it, you have nothing to worry about.

Short Papers

To promote informed discussion, eight short (three double-spaced pages) papers are required. These papers should analyze the assigned books, place them in the context of the literature on the topic, and assess both their contributions to the field and their weaknesses. The goal of the exercise is to assess and critique the theory from within its own perspective. In other words, rather than saying that rational choice theory or structural functionalism is wrong or right, seek to understand the theory from its own perspective and think through its assumptions, logic, and claims. Then you can specify where you find the logic convincing or faulty, rigorous or incomplete, compelling or circular, strong or generally unintelligible. This exercise should occupy most of your essay. You may well wish to use a final paragraph or two to explain some implications of the theory for research or practice but that is not the primary goal of the exercise. You may also want to "step outside" of the given theory's structure and argue that entire exercise of trying to explain social conflict from this perspective is flawed and that some other theory is better. Illustrating with a case about which you are familiar may be a useful means to demonstrate either the value or weakness of a given concept or causal connection but the point of these brief essays is to analyze the theory as theory.

Each paper is worth 8 percent of your grade and the eight papers therefore total 64 percent of your final grade. Students may write these papers for all twelve weeks and have the lowest four grades dropped or may skip up to four weeks. A student who hands in fewer than eight papers will receive zero points for the missing essays. The papers *must* be handed in at the beginning of the class in which the topic is discussed. If a student cannot attend a class, e-mail or faxed submissions can be accepted but it is the student's responsibility to make sure that the paper arrives. The three page limit is designed to compel students to focus on one or two core points. Longer papers will be viewed as evidence that the student has difficulties distinguishing critical points from minor points.

Final Paper

There will be a take-home final paper due on May 7. This 15-page paper will be in response to one of two questions that will be handed out on the last day of class, April 30. The question will be broad, allowing each student to link and reflect upon many of the theories discussed in class. This take-home final paper will account for 25 percent of the total grade. You will naturally build on your earlier, short papers in writing this final

paper but this paper should integrate and link the various theories, not merely summarize your earlier views on specific theories.

Readings:

The following books have been ordered through the university bookstore. They are also on reserve in the Arlington Library and most will be available at any university library. We will be reading all of each.

Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (Norton 2001).

Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement* (University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Robert Bates, *When Things Fall Apart: State Failure in Late Century Africa* (Cambridge, 2008).

Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1985).

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd edition, New York: Verso, 1991).

Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (University of California, 2000).

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977).

Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (University of California Press, 1986).

Week One (January 22): Introduction to the Course

In addition to a review of the syllabus and course requirements, we will discuss questions relating to the purpose of theories and their relationship to research and practice in conflict analysis and resolution.

Week Two (January 29): Structural-Functionalism

Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

Week Three (February 5): Power and Realism

John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (Norton, 2001).

Week Four (February 12): Contentious Politics and Social Movements

Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Week Five (February 19): Rational Choice and Collective Action

Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement* (University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Week Six (February 26): Rational Choice and Violence

Robert Bates, *When Things Fall Apart: State Failure in Late Century Africa* (Cambridge, 2008).

Week Seven (March 5): Social Revolutions

Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

Week Eight (March 12): Power and Resistance

James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1985).

Week Nine (March 19): Nationalism

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd edition, Verso, 1991).

Week Ten (March 26): NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week Eleven (April 2): Post-Colonial Studies

Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

Week Twelve (April 9): Ethnic Conflict

Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (University of California, 2000).

Week Thirteen (April 16): Postmodernism

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (Vintage, 1977).

Week Fourteen (April 23): Structure and Agency

Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (University of California Press, 1986).

Week Fifteen (April 30): Integration

Final paper question will be distributed in class on April 30 and will be due on May 7.