Syllabus

Political Sociology

Sociology 131, Political Sociology
Winter Quarter 2021
Instructor: Prof. Howard Winant
Teaching Assistant: TBA

LECTURE:
Place: Virtual classroom
Time: M/W 1-2:15, synchronous

Winant's Office Hours: Wed 1000am-1200pm, via Zoom

INTRODUCTION

It is a challenge to study political sociology in the present moment. In the year 2020 the United States, and the world at large, are experiencing the largest political and social crisis to occur in many decades. The entire planet confronts the real possibility of ecocide, the prospect of extinction. A dangerous and contagious disease, COVID19, sweeps across the globe, hitting the US particularly hard. US democracy, social cohesion, and indeed the future of the nation are in doubt, more threatened than they have been in living memory. Even after Trump we confront the politics of reactionary populism (sometimes called “authoritarian populism”), that reproduces aspects of the most volatile, violent, and dangerous movements of our past.
Political sociology is the study of power as a social relationship. Max Weber famously defined power as defined power as "...the chance that an individual in a social relationship can achieve his or her own will even against the resistance of others," in other words the ability to make someone do what they do not want to do (Weber 1922, 212). How is power wielded? By whom and over whom? Who holds power and how did they acquire it? These are some of the central themes in the field of political sociology. They all involve structured social relationships.

Political sociology is a huge subject. Power operates as a dynamic set of interactions among human individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions. Among these relationships we find democracy and dictatorship; authority and coercion; (in)equality and exploitation; domination and subordination. We also find resistance, contentious culture (say, Fox vs. MSNBC), and identity politics. Many institutions and social structures also express these relationships, "condensed," into familiar patterns: social classes, the state and citizenship, family, the nation, elites, parties, social movements, interest groups, masses, etc. Class, race, sex/gender are also located here, overlapping and mixing in what we call intersectionality. All these are locations where power is exercised and experienced in society. In this course we examine the dynamics of these relationships and structures.

On top of all that we are in a crisis. The COVID pandemic, the economic chaos surrounding us, the threats to our democracy (and to that of others as well), and perhaps above all, the ecological crisis, ecocide it could be called, must be addressed. These are the major political (and sociological) issues of this moment. These must be the key themes in our course.

In this situation of crisis, I have revised the standard political sociology course syllabus. Over the years I have taught Soc 131 many times, focusing on such concepts as pluralism, elite- and class-based theories of power, nation-states, nationalism, sovereignty, democracy and despotism, and social movements. Without forgetting the importance of all these themes, we will making the current social and political crisis the central focus of our studies.

Therefore the course will be organized around the following five big themes:

1. Ecocide/Climate Crisis
2. Health Crisis: Race, Class, and Premature Death
3. Gender/Sexuality Crisis
4. Crisis of Democracy and the Capitalist State
5. Social Movements Challenging the System

Key readings are associated with each class session; the readings will be discussed on the date listed.

This is a virtual course. Each class session will have a Gauchocast lecture, available for asynchronous viewing at least 48 hours before the Zoom class session. The sessions themselves will be synchronous (that is, live) Zoom sessions. I will be asking questions and conducting discussion during the live Zoom sessions.

**Working Groups**: Not only is the syllabus organized around five big themes but your work will be organized that way as well. While the course will consider all five thematic areas, all students will specialize in one of the five crisis areas listed above. Once locating yourself within your particular area, you will be paired with two other students within a working group. Working groups will be composed of three students, assigned randomly within each of the five thematic areas listed above. You will collaborate with the two other students in your working group to produce your written assignments.

Everyone will choose an area of specialization from the list of themes above, during the first week of the class. Working groups will be set up during the second week of class. Submitted papers -- midterm and final -- will be co-authored by all three people in the working group, working together online. All the members of the working group will receive the same grade for each paper they submit, so everyone should plan on being engaged, discussing the issues, and cooperating well with their group. See Gauchospace for more information; this will also be discussed during the first class session.

**Readings**: Assigned readings for the course are listed in the syllabus below and linked on Gauchospace as well. Almost all the readings can be downloaded directly from the web, but occasionally a reading has to be downloaded from Gauchospace instead, because it isn't available online or is paywalled. Readings are generally articles, essays, or chapter excerpts, but sometimes longer-form stuff. Readings are due for the class where they are listed.

Each of our five crisis themes will be considered in class for about two weeks, so there are about four class sessions worth of required readings about it. All students should do all the reading, but students choosing to specialize in each particular area should pay special attention to the readings in that area, since this is where their working group papers -- midterm and final -- will be focused.

**Written Assignments**: There are two written assignments in the class, a Midterm paper and a Final paper. As noted, these are both working group projects that you will write with the two other people in your working group's area of specialization. Here are the prompts for the two written assignments:

**Midterm paper (due on Gauchospace Sunday, Feb 7, before 600pm):**

*Each crisis that we focus on in this class has its sources and causes. It did not spring up out of nowhere, all at once, but instead is the outcome of social relationships occurring over time: conflict or cooperation, organization or disorganization. Each crisis therefore has political dimensions; it is the result of power relationships in society. In your midterm paper, your working group should describe the crisis and analyze its origins. What are its*
key elements, its social and political dimensions? Why has the crisis taken shape as it has? Recommended length: about 6 double-spaced pages: c. 1800 words.

Final paper (due on Gauchospace before 600pm, Sun March 21):

Our treatment of these five current crises considers not only their origins but their potential outcomes. Each of these crises contains both hopeful dreams and frightening nightmares. It is possible that these crises will be resolved in way that is supportive to people in this society (or the world at large); it is also possible that they will not be resolved and will do enormous damage to human life, to social justice, or to nature itself. That is the nature of crisis: its uncertain outcome. In your final paper, your working group should consider the possible outcome(s) of the crisis in which you are specializing. Describe and analyze the situation of the crisis today and reflect upon those potential outcomes. What are the social and political forces likely to shape the development and possible resolution of this crisis? What social and political actions should we expect to see as the crisis develops? Recommended length: about 10 double-spaced pages, c. 3000 words.

Final note: This course is both rewarding and demanding. It is built on respect and high academic standards. Participating in it effectively, and getting a good grade, means thinking deeply about both where you stand and how you understand US society today. It means being willing to raise and respond to uncomfortable questions. It means engaging deeply and reflecting seriously on the course material. This is another reason why this class has been organized with a crisis-oriented course content. This is also why working groups of three students have been chosen as the way you will do your written work.

I don’t expect everyone to agree with me or with each other. Indeed I welcome open, honest, and respectful discussion about the issues I have just listed. I seek to channel our class activities toward appropriate educational objectives.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Week 1

Tues Jan 5
Introduction to the course: syllabus, readings, requirements. Our approach to political sociology. Our approach to doing the coursework (working groups of three students each).

Thurs Jan 7
Climate crisis and ecocide

*The facts, research, and science behind the climate-change article that explored our planet’s worst-case scenarios.*

Lindgren, Tim. "Ecocide, Genocide and the Disregard of Alternative Life-Systems.."
Ecocide is a structurally reoccurring phenomenon contributing to a serious disequilibrium in the Earth-system that buttress all planetary life. Ecocide is also a possible method of genocide if it fragments or destroys vital socioecological and cultural relationships between humans and nature. Practises that inflict ecocide are hence often responsible for the destruction of ecological and social life-systems that face adversities due to deteriorating ecological conditions. This article therefore articulates the importance of an international crime of ecocide that can prosecute perpetrators for acts of ecocide as well as ecocidally induced physical and cultural genocide under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2017.1397631

Week 2

Tues Jan 12
Climate crisis and ecocide

Two articles by Bill McKibben:
   Review of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, 11/2018
2. "130 Degrees."
   This is going to be a century of crises, many of them more dangerous than what we’re living through now.
   https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2020/08/20/climate-emergency-130-degrees/

Pollin, Robert. "Advancing a Viable Global Climate Stabilization Project: Degrowth versus the Green New Deal."
This paper summarizes a global Green New Deal program that can advance climate stabilization as well as rising mass living standards and an expansion of decent job opportunities. The core features of this program are massive global investments in energy efficiency and clean renewable energy so that clean energy supplants the existing fossil-fuel-dominant global energy system.
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0486613419833518

Thurs Jan 14
Climate crisis and ecocide

Pellow, David N. "Environmental Studies and Ethnic Studies: Tensions, Collaborations, Intersections."
This article offers insights into conceptual, pedagogical, and programmatic crossings and conflicts between the fields of Environmental Studies and Ethnic Studies. It highlights both the important intersections between the two fields and their potential value, while also addressing the challenges posed in the development of programmatic collaborations.
https://doi.org/10.1525/esr.2020.43.2.9 [Download .pdf version after accessing this page]

Set a couple of decades from now, this short film is a flat-out rejection of the idea that a dystopian future is a forgone conclusion. Instead, it offers a thought experiment: What if we decided not to drive off the climate cliff? What if we chose to radically change course
and save both our habitat and ourselves?
What if we actually pulled off a Green New Deal? What would the future look like then?
https://naomiklein.org/video-message-future-alexandra-ocasio-cortez/

NASA. "Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet"
This is NASA's selection of key indicators and studies of the developing climate crisis. It addresses such subjects as drought, wildfires, sea level rise, climate refugees/migration, and shifting weather patterns.
https://climate.nasa.gov/resources/graphics-and-multimedia/?page=1&per_page=25&order=pub_date+desc&search=&condition_1=1%3Ais_in_resource_list

Week 3

Tues Jan 19
Health Crisis: Class, Race, and Premature Death

Case, Anne, and Angus Deaton. "Rising Morbidity and Mortality in Midlife among White Non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st Century."
This paper documents a marked increase in the all-cause mortality of middle-aged white non-Hispanic men and women in the United States between 1999 and 2013. This change reversed decades of progress in mortality and was unique to the United States; no other rich country saw a similar turnaround. The midlife mortality reversal was confined to white non-Hispanics; black non-Hispanics and Hispanics at midlife, and those aged 65 and above in every racial and ethnic group, continued to see mortality rates fall. This increase for whites was largely accounted for by increasing death rates from drug and alcohol poisonings, suicide, and chronic liver diseases and cirrhosis.
https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/112/49/15078.full.pdf

To take stock of the human toll resulting from racial inequality in the United States, we estimate the number of excess deaths that accumulated among African Americans over the twentieth century as indicated by the enduring racial gap in mortality rates. We assemble a wide array of demographic and vital statistics data for all years since 1900 to calculate the number of Black deaths in each half-decade that occurred in excess of what would be projected if Blacks had experienced the same gender- and age-specific mortality rates as Whites.
https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/du-bois-review-social-science-research-on-race/article/toll-of-inequality/9F0994F128271F21B04749C1E8D905C1/core-reader

Thurs Jan 21
Health Crisis: Class, Race, and Premature Death

Davis, Mike. "Reopening the Economy Will Send Us to Hell."
People desperately need to go back to work and save what they can of their lives. But Mike Davis argues that a rapid reopening of the economy would only result in unspeakable tragedy for millions.

By May 15, 2020, all 50 states had announced plans to reopen their economies. These plans emerged on the heels of an increasing awareness that COVID-19 had hit minority communities particularly hard, especially Black communities. Despite constituting only 13% of the US population, Blacks have made up 24% of the deaths from COVID-19 nationally, rendering them at least twice as likely to die from COVID-19 than are other groups.


Racial disparities are apparent in the impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the United States, yet the factors contributing to racial inequities in COVID-19 mortality remain controversial. To better understand these factors, we investigated racial disparities in COVID-19 mortality among America's essential workers.

https://doi.org/10.1002/wmh3.358

Week 4
Health Crisis: Class, Race, and Premature Death

Tues Jan 26
Gonsalves, Gregg, and Amy Kapczynski. "The New Politics of Care."
The right response to COVID-19 is to rebuild our economy from the ground up, putting people to work in a massive jobs program to secure the public health of all.
https://bostonreview.net/politics/gregg-gonsalves-amy-kapczynski-new-politics-care

Thurs Jan 28
In three decades of advocating for prison abolition, the activist and scholar has helped transform how people think about criminal justice.

Week 5
Gender/Sexuality Crisis

Tues Feb 2
Fraser, Nancy. "Contradictions of Capital and Care."
The ‘crisis of care’ is currently a major topic of public debate. Often linked to ideas of ‘time poverty’, ‘family-work balance’, and ‘social depletion’, it refers to the pressures from several directions that are currently squeezing a key set of social capacities: those available for birthing and raising children, caring for friends and family members, maintaining households and broader communities, and sustaining connections more generally.

Silvia Federici, "Notes on Gender in Marx's Capital."
Marx never developed a theory of gender. It is important to include the role of reproductive labour, slave labour, migrant labour, labour in the Global South and the unemployed in the critical analysis of capitalism and its division of labour. Reproductive labour is the largest activity on this planet and a major ground of divisions within the working class. 
https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10092/14484/3 Federici capital.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Thurs Feb 4
No reading assignment
Work on MidTerm

MIDTERM PAPER: due on GauchoSpace
Sunday, Feb 7, before 600pm

Week 6
Gender/Sexuality Crisis

Tues Feb 9
Manne, Kate. "The Logic of Misogyny."
*What unites these varieties of misogyny, past and present, and moralistic and non-moralistic alike, is that they enforce the patriarchal order by lifting men up and taking down women.*
https://bostonreview.net/forum/kate-manne-logic-misogyny


Thurs Feb 11
Morris, Bonnie J. "History of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Social Movements"
*Social movements, organizing around the acceptance and rights of persons who might today identify as LGBT or queer, began as responses to centuries of persecution by church, state and medical authorities.*
https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/history

Gessen, Masha. "The Supreme Court Considers L.G.B.T. Rights, but Can’t Stop Talking About Bathrooms."
"On Tuesday, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in arguably the highest-impact L.G.B.T.-rights cases ever to come before the Justices. The day before, I received what appeared to be a standard memo for members of the press who request a seat at a Supreme Court hearing: ‘The dress code in the press section is business attire (coat and tie required for men).’"

Week 7
Crisis of Democracy and the Capitalist State

Tues Feb 16
Officer A. Cab (pesudonym). "Confessions of a Former Bastard Cop."
Medium, June 6, 2020.
I was a police officer for nearly ten years and I was a bastard. We all were.
https://medium.com/@OfcrACab/confessions-of-a-former-bastard-cop-bb14d17bc759

Seigel, Micol
"The dilemma of ‘racial profiling’: an abolitionist police history."
Against ‘racial profiling’s’ suggestion of incidental, improper police practice, this essay offers a history of the U.S. police that shows their deep and abiding commitment to reproducing race and racism.

Thurs Feb 18
Crain, Caleb. "Is Capitalism a Threat to Democracy?"
The idea that authoritarianism attracts workers harmed by the free market, which emerged when the Nazis were in power, has been making a comeback.
https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/05/14/is-capitalism-a-threat-to-democracy

Week 8
Crisis of Democracy and the Capitalist State

Tues Feb 23
Lozado, Carlos. "20 Ways to Recognize Tyranny — and Fight It," by Timothy Snyder
"On Tyranny" [provides... ] 20 plain and mostly actionable lessons on preventing, or at least forestalling, the repression of lives and minds. Don't count Snyder among the American-exceptionalism crowd, at least not as the concept is usually understood.
"Americans today are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to fascism, Nazism, or communism in the twentieth century."

Thurs, Feb 27
Alves, Jamie Amparo. "Spatial Praxis in São Paulo, Brazil. From Necropolis to Blackpolis: Necropolitical Governance and Black Spatial Praxis in São Paulo, Brazil."
Far from being isolated events, targeted assassinations and disappearances have become part of the increasingly sophisticated policing practices in São Paulo’s favela. This strategy is effective for two reasons: first, without the evidence of a dead body, police officers are rarely held accountable for these deaths; second, by destroying the bodies, the state keeps victims’ families and their entire communities in a permanent state of terror.

Thurs Feb 25
Benanav, Aaron. "Service Work in the Pandemic Economy"
The rapid spread of COVID-19 interacted with long-unfolding economic trends to set a global tinder box aflame. Over the past thirty years, the world’s workforce has increasingly found employment in low-wage, low-productivity jobs in
the global services sector. The pandemic lockdowns hit these sorts of activities the hardest. Opportunities to work evaporated, spreading both poverty and hunger around the world. The same rise in global service sector employment shares, which amplified the pandemic lockdown’s destructive effects, will now slow the pace of the recovery.


Short recent pieces from Labor Notes:
Nat Luftman, Alice Troop, and James Cordero. "We Reinvigorated Our Undergrad Union... Just in Time for COVID Fights."

Richard de Vries."Turn the Tables: Demand Concessions from Your Employer." https://www.labornotes.org/2020/09/turn-tables-demand-concessions-your-employer


Joe DeManuelle-Hall. "Soak the Rich, Now More Than Ever'
https://www.labornotes.org/blogs/2020/10/soak-rich-now-more-ever

Week 9
Social Movements Challenging the System

Tues Mar 2
M4BL. "Vision for Black Lives/ 2020 Policy Platform."
The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) launched the Vision for Black Lives, a comprehensive and visionary policy agenda for the post-Ferguson Black liberation movement, in August of 2016.
https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/

Thurs March 4
Hostler, Monika Johnson, and Moira O'Neil. "Reframing Sexual Violence: From #MeToo to Time’s Up."
In the shift from #MeToo to Time’s Up, movement leaders are strategically framing sexual violence as a social and cultural problem, rather than an individual problem.
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/reframing_sexual_violence_from_metoo_to_times_up

Week 10
Social Movements Challenging the System

Tues March 9
Chotiner, Isaac and Michael Kazin. "How Socialist Is Bernie Sanders?"
Sanders is running on a more ambitious platform than most American voters have seen in their lifetimes, promising to create a single-payer, national health-insurance program; to offer free tuition at public colleges and trade schools and to cancel student debt; and to launch a Green New Deal, which would fully transition electricity and transportation to renewable energy within ten years.


Political Research Associates (PRA), with input from our colleagues at the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights (IREHR), has been tracking incidents of far right and paramilitary interference with racial justice and police accountability protests since Minneapolis police killed George Floyd on May 25, 2020. Given the tensions surrounding the 2020 general elections, we have also started to track election-related instances of voter intimidation and violence.

http://www.politicalresearch.org/2020/06/19/mapping-paramilitary-and-far-right-threats-racial-justice

Thurs Mar 11
Last day of class

FINAL PAPER: due on Gauchospace before 600pm, Sun March 21.