POLS 393: Capitalism, Racism, Patriarchy

This course is designed to teach you to think seriously about structural power. It’s easy to imagine that individual people, or even numbers of individual people, affect things (or don't) -- or, we might say, exercise power(s) (or don't). But individuals are not the only type of social entity that causes effects in the world. Relationships between people (e.g., institutions such as the state, and whole systems, such as capitalism, racism and patriarchy) do too. In this course, we will examine the different "logics" of capitalism, racism and patriarchy, and then think through the fact that the systems are inter-related, with an aim to conceptualizing the situation as a whole. Do the different systems work in unique ways? How? If so, how do they condition each other when they are all in place in a society? Often these questions are addressed via an investigation of identity, experience and/or “difference.” We will be mindful of these issues, but they will not serve as our primary lens. Rather, we will be concerned to identify the systemic nature(s) of the social structures in question. Readings will range from Marx to bell hooks to more historical works.

This is an upper-level course in social and political philosophy, which means that I am assuming that you enjoy thinking abstractly, and have experience doing it. Students with no theory background are encouraged to consult with the professor before enrolling in the class.

General Expectations and Policies

The bottom line requirement for this course is that you do difficult reading very, very carefully (more than once, in most cases), and come to class prepared to talk about the material with others, in order to understand and evaluate it. If, for whatever reason, you are not in a position to take on a high level of intellectual responsibility and commitment, you should think hard about whether or not you will be able to meet this expectation; this may not be the course for you to take this semester.

Attendance is mandatory unless you are sick or face an emergency situation. Irregular participation will result in a significant reduction of the final grade or in failure. Cell phones, laptops and other electronic devices must be turned off during class. In keeping with the 5 principles of Jesuit education at SLU, I take it that comportment in the classroom will be good-natured, considerate and intellectually disciplined. I also expect that you will come to class on time.

All written and oral work must be either (a) your own ideas, expressed in your own words, or (b) properly referenced. Plagiarism will result in a failure for the course, at a minimum. Please ask me, if you have any questions about academic integrity, as not knowing that you have plagiarized does not make it acceptable to have done so. I encourage you to review the official University policy governing matters of integrity: http://www.slu.edu/x12657.xml.
If you have a disability that may impact your classroom performance, you must contact the Disabilities Services office, located in the Student Center, to arrange for appropriate accommodations. E-mail: meyerah@slu.edu. Please also let me know.

The easiest way to contact me is through e-mail, which I check frequently. In most cases I will be able to get back to you within 24 hours, if not sooner; if you haven’t heard back, send me another e-mail. I retrieve phone messages when I am in my office, but I am not on campus every day. I’m also delighted to talk to you in person.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

1. Participation [with the option of submitting a portfolio at the end of the term (consisting of summaries of readings, reactions, thoughts, etc.) to count for half of this grade] – 20%.

2. 3 short analytic papers, corresponding to each of the sections of the course - 40%
   - #1 = graded but doesn't count toward final mark;
   - #2 = 15%;
   - #3 = 25%

3. Final paper (8-10pp) – 40%
   - This paper will be an analysis of an issue of your choosing, using what you have learned in the course. You will be required to address, and critique, alternate accounts of the issue, in the course of developing your own analysis. Due at the end of the term..

Mid-semester, you will be required to have a short meeting with me in my office, to check in on your progress in the course.

Your grade will be based on your performance on the assignments listed above. You must submit all assignments in order to pass the class. There is no extra credit available for the completion of additional work.

I give letter grades, corresponding to qualitative assessment criteria. I do not grade on a distributional curve; your grade is based solely on the quality of your own performance. I am a very transparent grader, and I am happy to talk with you about how to do your best in the course and to develop intellectually. Grading criteria are attached. As you can see, while SLU recommends a grade of B for work that is “above average,” I give a grade of B+ for work of this caliber.

I don’t accept late papers, unless you have contacted me ahead of time or it is an emergency.

Books

The following books have been ordered through the SLU Bookstore:

*Rigging the Game: How Inequality is Reproduced in Everyday Life, Schwalbe
*The Rules of Sociological Method, Durkheim
*The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy, Johnson
*The Racial Contract, Mills
*The Nature and Logic of Capitalism, Heilbroner
Capital, Vol. 1, Marx
Democracy Against Capitalism, Wood
Materialist Feminism, (ed.) Hennessy
*Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism, Himani Bannerji
*Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor, Evelyn Nakano Glenn
Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination, Robin Kelley

I am trying to get these titles (and a few others) to be available to you on 2 hr reserve, though the library may need to purchase some of them, so this option may not be sure-fire for books used early in the term. You do not necessarily need to purchase all of the texts. The ones I consider most important to purchase are marked with an asterisk.
**Introductory Concepts**

**Week 1 – Framing the Intellectual Project – Dialectics and Structural Power**

Jan 12 – First meeting: what to expect from the course
Jan 14  Lecture – “Problematic Assumptions, Missing Categories”
   Schwalbe, *Rigging the Game*, Intro., ch. 4

**Week 2 – Sociological Phenomena: Social Facts, Social Structures,**
Jan 19 and 21
   Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, selections
   McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”
   Schwalbe, ch. 1 and 2
   Heilbroner, ch. 1
   Lemert, “The Mysterious Power of Social Structures” (e-res)
   Recommended: Porpora, “Four Concepts of Social Structure” (e-res)

**Analytic Abstractions**

**Week 3 and 4 – Abstraction #1: Patriarchy**
Jan 26, 28, Feb 2, 4

   Johnson, *The Gender Knot*
   Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex” (e-res)

**Week 5 and 6 – Abstraction #2: Racism**
Feb 9, 11, 16, 18

   Mills, *The Racial Contract*
   Tatum, “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” and
   *Other Conversations About Race*, ch. 1 (e-res)
   Robinson, *Black Marxism* chs 1-6
   Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, chs 2 and 3
   Davis, *The Angela Davis Reader*, selections
Week 7 – Abstraction #3: Capitalism
Feb 23 and 25

Marx, Capital, selections
Albritton, Economics Transformed, chs. 2 and 3
Heilbroner, The Nature and Logic of Capitalism, chs. 2 and 3

Week 8 – Midterm
March 2 - No new reading
March 4 - Mid-term

SPRING BREAK

Week 9 – Capitalism, cont.
March 16, 18
Ellen Wood, Democracy Against Capitalism, chs. 1, 7, 8
Heilbroner, chs. 4 and 5

Week 10 – Discussion continued
March 23, 25
No new reading

Dialectical Dynamics: Patriarchy, Racism, Capitalism

Week 11 – Dialectics as a Way of Thinking
March 30 and April 1 (no class 4/1; really)
Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?” (e-res)
Himani Bannerji, Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism, selections
Ollman, “Dialectic as Inquiry and Exposition” (e-res)
One article on “intersectionality,” t.b.a.

Week 12 – Thinking Dialectically about “Gender”
April 6, 8

Bannerji, selections
Angela Davis, selections
b hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, ch. 2 (e-res)
(ed. R. Hennessy) Materialist Feminism, selections
Heidi Hartmann, “Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex” (e-res)
Nicholson, “Feminism and Marx: Integrating Kinship with the Economic” (e-res)
Week 13 – Thinking Dialectically about “Race”  
April 13 and 15

  Angela Davis, selections  
  Robin Kelley, Race Rebels, selections; Freedom Dreams

Week 14 – Thinking Dialectically about “Class”  
April 20 and 22

  Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor  
  Barbara Ehrenreich, “What is Socialist Feminism?” (in Hennessy)  
  Mills, From Class to Race, selections

Week 15 – Discussion continued  
April 27 and 29  
No new reading