

SOC 345-TH: Activism and Social Theory Fall 2010

Class Time: Wednesdays 7:00 - 9:45 PM, B 460
Instructor: Nina Brown
E-mail: nbrown@mica.edu
Office and office hours: Bunting 417, by appointment

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

- Karl Marx, 1845

Efforts to understand human society have always been linked to activist struggles to achieve social change. This course examines some of the major social theories of the 20th and 21st centuries including Marxism, critical theory, and postmodernism. We will consider the influence of these ideas on social movements such as the labor movement, the student movement of the 1960s, and the anti-globalization movement and we will discuss the ways in which the form, content and goals of activist efforts evolve in connection with ideas from philosophers and social scientists.

What You Need to Know About This Course

This course examines the power of ideas: to persuade, to inspire, and even to bring about social change. The thoughtful exchange of ideas between people who respect each other is critical for both social movements and the academic learning process. Because I strongly believe that the form of this class should mirror its content, we will be using a style of class organization known as a *democratic classroom*, in which all the participants (students and teacher) share responsibility for deciding what happens in our class. Like traditional courses, this class includes reading assignments, films and some lectures, but during each class meeting it will be you, the students, who determine how best to explore the course materials.

Required Books—available in the bookstore and on reserve in the library

- ♣ Takin' it to the Streets: A Sixties Reader edited by Bloom and Breines
- ♣ The History of Sexuality by Michel Foucault
- ♣ Texts in our Moodle classroom: classroom.mica.edu

Course Requirements

	<u>Points</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
5 Reading Response Papers	30 (6 points each)	You choose the dates
Film Review	10	Completed <u>in class</u> on November 17
Current Issues Class Report	10	Signup for date/topic
Final Project: Activist Group	40 points (presentation is 10 points of that total)	Topic due Nov 3; Paper and presentations on
Class Participation	10 points	Weekly

Reading Response Papers: During the semester, you will submit **5 short writing assignments**. Each paper should be 2 pages (single-spaced) and will relate to the reading assignment. Reading responses are due at the start of class and must address the assigned reading for the **current class**. Your paper should have 3 sections:

1. “What is This All About?” Describe in a **paragraph or two** your thoughts about what the author(s) were trying to accomplish and what you think of their ideas. Do you agree/disagree with the way the author(s) have presented the problem or solution? Did the reading assignment leave you feeling surprised, dissatisfied, frustrated, etc.? In weeks when we have several authors assigned, it is fine to comment on the general theme the reading assignments had in common, or to talk about 1 or 2 authors in particular.
2. “Importance for Activists.” In this section, give your opinion about why the content of the reading assignments matter for activists. For instance, what vision of the world is proposed in the reading? What kinds of tactics are suggested? What lessons could an activist take away from the reading? Are there ideas that activists would be likely to disagree about? Many of our assignments are historical in nature, please do not tell me they are important because we need to know our history. That is true, but think about which specific lessons or ideas from the past should still be taken seriously today—or which ideas and tactics you think should not be used today.
3. “Questions.” Write at least **3 discussion questions** about the reading assignment(s).
You can start by thinking about what you might ask the author if he/she were coming to class. Think about issues or controversial points you would like to talk about with your classmates.

Current Issue Class Report: During one class this semester you will be asked to contribute to the discussion by investigating a current event or topic and sharing what you have learned with your classmates. I will assign the topics and you may choose

your date/topic from the sign-up sheet, which will be posted permanently on Moodle following the 1st class. This is meant to be a brief informal talk that requires only some basic Internet research (i.e. Googling) or in some cases a visit to an event. **Please note:** Although this assignment calls for Internet research, you should be careful not to copy (plagiarize) what you find online. This assignment requires you to summarize or synthesize information from Internet sources in your own words while adding your own opinions.

Activism Project: For this assignment, I am asking you to choose an activist group to analyze in a 4 page (single spaced) written report and brief presentation to the class. You may choose an activist group that you are already familiar with (or part of), or you can mix things up by choosing a group that you completely disagree with and feel furious just thinking about! Your job is to figure out how the activist group “works” by identifying the social theories (the big ideas) that inspire them and analyzing the tactics they choose along with the ones they avoid. You will also make some conclusions about how the group fits into the history of activism we have discussed and provide your judgment about whether this group is going to be a powerful force in the future or... not. You can use a variety of information gathering techniques for this assignment including Google stalking (checking up on the activities of the group online), interviews with participants, attending group events, or checking newspaper archives. You must **submit your choice of activist group by November 3rd**. When choosing, please be sure there is enough information available about your group.

Class Participation

We will be spending a large portion of the class engaged in group discussions as well as small group activities. I will not be grading you on the *amount* of talking you do. However, I expect everyone to share equally in all small group activities. Attending faithfully will not be sufficient to achieve full credit for class participation. If you are less comfortable speaking in front of the whole class, you may assist with the discussion in other ways such as 1) contributing news or current events at the start of class 2) e-mailing comments or questions to me before class. Please be advised that unexcused absences from class seriously detract from your grade. In the event of illness or other unavoidable situation, you should contact me (e-mail is fine) on or before the day of class. Except for emergency situations, it will be harder to convince me that your absence should be excused if you wait until after the date of class to tell me about it. Habitual lateness, leaving early from class, and sleeping during class will also lower your grade.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is using someone else’s words or *ideas* without acknowledgment. Submitting work containing plagiarism is grounds for failure of an assignment or failure of the course. Repeat offenses will be brought to the attention of the Chair. To be responsible when summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting, include a citation (author, date, page) in your paper and a reference for each of your information sources at the

end of the paper. Follow standard guidelines such as MLA or APA.

ADA Compliance

Learning Resource Center ADA Compliance Statement Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://www.mica.edu/LRC>

Health and Safety

It is the responsibility of faculty and students to practice health and safety guidelines relevant to their individual activities, processes, and to review MICA's Emergency Action Plan and attend EHS training. It is each faculty member's responsibility to coordinate with the EHS Office to ensure that all risks associated with their class activities are identified and to assure that their respective classroom procedures mirror the EHS and Academic Department guidelines. Each of these policies and procedures must be followed by all students and faculty. Most importantly, faculty are to act in accordance with all safety compliance, state and federal, as employees of this college and are expected to act as examples of how to create art in a way to minimize risk, and reduce harm to themselves and the environment. Faculty must identify, within each art making process, and require personal protection equipment use, by each student for each class, when applicable. Students are required to purchase personal protection equipment appropriate to their major. Those students who do not have the proper personal protection equipment will not be permitted to attend class until safe measures and personal protection is in place.

Schedule and Reading Assignments

September 1: Activism and Social Theory: Introduction

September 8: The Materialist Approach to Society: Birth of the Modern Left

Marx: The Communist Manifesto: Prologue/Preamble (1 page), Section 1 (Bourgeois and Proletarians) and Section 2 (Proletarians and Communists). Found online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>

September 15: Anti-Communism: Birth of the Modern Right with film “Atomic Café”

Nickerson: Moral Mothers and Goldwater Girls. Moodle.
Newsweek: Saint Sarah. Moodle.

September 22: Identifying Sites of Power and Resistance

Mills: The Power Elite excerpt. Moodle.
Klein: The Shock Doctrine excerpt. Moodle.

September 29: Materialism and Spiritualism: The Civil Rights Movement with film “Eyes on the Prize”

Sixties Reader, Chapter One: The Power of Nonviolence; The Jackson Sit In; SNCC Founding Statement; Wake-Up America; Selma.
King: My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence. Moodle.

October 6: The New Left with Guest Speakers from Workers United

Sixties Reader, Chapter Two: The Port Huron Statement; Letter to the New Left; The Politics of the ‘Movement;’ An End to History; Student Power: A Radical View

Sixties Reader, Chapter Four: The Incredible War

Sixties Reader, Chapter Six: If Mob Rule Takes Hold in the U.S.

October 13: Identity Politics I: Race and Ethnicity with film “At the River I Stand”

Sixties Reader, Chapter Three: The Ballot or the Bullet ; The Basis of Black Power; The Black Panther Platform; Requiem for Nonviolence; El Plan de Aztlan; The Emergence of Yellow Power; Watts and Little Big Horn.

Sixties Reader, Chapter Six: COINTELPRO section read the “Who Were the Targets” section. Additional reading about COINTELPRO is optional depending on your interest.

October 20: Identity Politics II: Gender and Sexuality

Sixties Reader, Chapter One: Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo;

Sixties Reader, Chapter Eight: The Problem That Has No Name; No More Miss America; About My Consciousness Raising; The Woman-Identified Woman

Sixties Reader, Chapter Nine: Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square; What We Want
What We Believe

October 27: Violence as Tactic and Philosophy with film “The Weather Underground”

Churchill: Pacifism and Pathology excerpt. Moodle.

November 3: Freeing Your Mind

****Deadline to Choose Activist Group for Final Project****

Marcuse: One-Dimensional Man excerpt. Moodle.

Davis: Marcuse’s Legacies. Moodle.

November 10: Post-Modernism Introduction

Best and Kellner: Dawns, Twilights and Transitions. Moodle.

Begin reading Foucault for class on 12/1

Foucault: The History of Sexuality.

November 17: Anti-Globalization as a Post-Modern Project with film “This is What Democracy Looks Like”

Direct Action to Stop War: Anti-Authoritarian Organizing in Practice. Moodle.

Starbucks Workers Union: The Precarious Economy and Its Discontents. Moodle.

November 24: Thanksgiving Break-No Class

December 1: Power and Social Control: The Post-Modern Perspective

Foucault reading assignment should be completed for this class.

December 8: International Organizing (Activist Project Presentations Begin)

Sen: Building Movements in North America in the Age of Globalized Capital. Moodle.

Peck: You Are What You Eat. Moodle.

Declaration of Nyeleni. Moodle.

Website: US Social Forum. Link on Moodle.

Website: World Social Forum. Link on Moodle.

Website: International Forum on Globalization. Link on Moodle. (Watch some of keynote video)

Website: Via Campesina. Link on Moodle.

December 15: Is Another World Possible? (Activist Project Presentations Continue)

****Activism Project Due****