

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m., and by appointment (I'm often around, so drop by anytime you're so inclined)

Texts and Readings

G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?*

Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2 ed.

William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism*

Other readings are available on-line at: <http://www2.skidmore.edu/library/reserves/index.cfm> (log in, then find our course, then locate the correct reading, and you're off!); some will also be e-mailed to you.

About Political Sociology

More than anything else, the field of Political Sociology is about the myriad ways that *power* is played out in society. Power pervades society. It is present at the national and international levels to be sure, but also interpersonally in our daily lives. It takes on different forms as well, and, while we most commonly think of power as a political concept, it rarely is narrowly "political" and nothing else.

This semester, we will examine power primarily at the national and international levels, with some attention to its manifestations in local arenas. Throughout, our emphasis will be on power as a theoretical concept; we will read only one book and a couple of articles that empirically examine manifestations of power, and even they are well-grounded in theory.

It is important to make a distinction between political science and political sociology. Political scientists examine the minutiae of government: how Congress operates, what makes bureaucracies tick, the intricacies of international relations, distinctions between different forms of government. They also theorize and philosophize about how government ought to work in the ideal.

Political sociologists concern themselves less with these details than what occurs behind the scenes, even further behind them than most political scientists care to look. If political scientists emphasize *what* occurs in policy making circles, political sociologists inquire about *how* laws get to look as they do: the ways that outcomes reflect underlying interests, especially economic and class interests. The pursuit of those interests is power in practice.

Historically, there have been moments of overlap between the discipline of political science and the sub-discipline of political sociology—one person has even served as president of *both* the American Sociological Association and the American Political Science Association—but until recently these overlaps were largely fleeting. Scholars in both areas tended to keep to themselves, with sociologists exploring power and political scientists examining the mechanics of governmental decision-making. Today, scholars in both disciplines are finding more in common with their colleagues "from across the aisle," and power is the theoretical nexus where they come together.

Course Goals

Most of all, I want you to leave this class with a sociological understanding of the pervasiveness of power relationships in society. That is, by the end of the semester you will possess an awareness of the role of class, economic, political, and other forms of social positioning and situatedness that affect what is done and how it is done—in other words, how power manifests itself—at all levels of governance, and outside of government as well. Put simply, *power is everywhere; it is omnipresent*. An awareness of its presence will improve your abilities as social analysts and social actors.

That last comment implies my second course goal: *I hope to politicize you*. The social milieu may have left you, like many others, with a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness. By saying that I want to politicize you, I do not mean that I want to turn you into young Republicrats or into Seniors for Stalin or any other such nonsense. I do mean to show you that society is in need of change and that that change can occur only through your involvement. I will leave the direction of change up to you. But your informed involvement is essential; *that* is politicization: engagement in the political processes of our lives with an intent to change those processes.

Course Requirements

There are four requirements for this course: completion of each day's reading on-time, class participation, three papers, and a critical evaluation of a piece of political music.

Please stay on top of the **reading**. Falling behind will affect your ability to both contribute meaningfully to class discussions and to put your best effort into your papers.

Class participation consists of your questions and observations about course material and is based on the *quality* of what you have to say, not simply on how often you speak. Your participation ideally will come on your own—I will only grudgingly call on you to participate. Class participation will count for 20 percent of your final grade.

As noted on the Class Calendar, below, you will write three **take-home papers** during the term, including the final, and you will have one week to complete each paper. My approach toward papers is that they extend the classroom learning experience. Thus, these papers *will not* be exercises in regurgitation. Rather, I will ask you to identify links between readings, lectures, and discussions, and I will expect you to think critically about the problems I present to you. While the papers will count for 75 percent of your grade in the course, they will be weighted such that the final paper counts the most toward your grade and the first paper the least.

Each week, one or two of you will be responsible for bringing a piece of "**political**" **music** to class, playing it for us, and interpreting it. While this assignment is intended to be fun, it must also be illuminating. Politically-oriented music is an important force in society--social movements march to it, activists are inspired by it, and audiences are motivated by it.

The political music assignment is worth 5 percent of your final grade, and I will evaluate your performance based on the following guidelines:

- Is the song appropriate—is it "political" in a meaningful sense?
- Have you interpreted the song correctly? Do you understand its historical context? Have you understood how *power* emerges in the song? Are there layers of meaning or multiple political messages—if so, have you identified them all?
- Finally, is it possible to make connections between some of the theories we discuss and your song? If so, you should make them.

You will present your interpretation orally to the class, with discussion to follow, and in written

form as a short paper *due to me by 3 o'clock on the day you present* (e-mailing your paper to me is acceptable). Your paper should be less than 500 words long.

Plagiarism

Skidmore's Honor Code is clear regarding the severe consequences that result from any act of cheating. In this course I will encourage you to cooperate with other students on many things, but unless I tell you otherwise, you may not work with others on your papers. The form of cheating most likely to emerge in our class is plagiarism. Should I find evidence that you have plagiarized, you will fail the course. To help you avoid plagiarism, review the "Writing Tips" web page, available through a link at our course web page, and follow the guidelines there and those discussed in class.

What You Should Do

To do well in this class, you need to do several things, all of which are important.

- First, keep up with the reading.
- Second, think about what you read. Write notes for yourself in the margins of the pages as you read, on a separate piece of paper, or on your computer. Some of these notes should be in the form of questions that may go from the seemingly mundane to the insightful, but all questions are good ones! Be an active reader.
- Third, be active in class. Ask some of those questions that you noted while you read, make seemingly off-the-wall connections, and do your best to be a teacher yourself. However, do not dominate small group or whole-class discussion; share this class with everyone and encourage everyone to be involved.
- Fourth, write well. Take my feedback seriously, change what needs to be changed, build on the good stuff, and grow as a writer.
- Fifth, write carefully. Do not plagiarize. Instead, use quote marks when you use someone else's words, attribute material to its author(s), and always cite and reference your sources. When you are unsure about whether you should quote, cite, or reference something, just ask me!
- Finally, drop by and see me some time. Let me help you get through this difficult material. Let's talk about your interpretations, the roadblocks to your understanding, and whatever else is on your mind. I will be available before class, during our mid-class breaks, after class, during my office hours, by e-mail, by phone both in my office and at home, and I will be available to you whenever you need to make an appointment.

Grading Summary

Three exams at 25 percent of the final grade each (average)	75 percent
Class Participation	20 percent
Political Song Assignment	<u>5 percent</u>
TOTAL.....	100 percent

Course Calendar

Introduction

Thursday, September 6.....Power!

Pluralism

Tuesday, September 11..... Rose (e-reserve)

Elite Theory

Thursday, September 13..... Mills (e-reserve)

Tuesday, September 18..... Burris (e-mail)

Thursday, September 20..... Domhoff, Chapter 1

Tuesday, September 25..... Domhoff, Chapters 2 and 3

Thursday, September 27..... Domhoff, Chapter 4

Tuesday, October 2..... Domhoff, Chapters 5 and 6

Thursday, October 4..... Domhoff, Chapter 7; *First Paper Assignment Distributed*

Tuesday, October 9..... Domhoff, Chapter 8

Thursday, October 11..... *First Papers Due*

Lukes' "Radical" Power

Tuesday, October 16..... Lukes, Introduction and Chapter 1

Thursday, October 18..... Lukes, pages 60-85

Tuesday, October 23..... Lukes, pages 85-107; *Second Papers Distributed*

Thursday, October 25..... Lukes, Chapter 3

Tuesday, October 30..... *Second Papers Due*

Globalization and Political-Economic Power

Thursday, November 1..... Robinson (e-reserve—through page 31)

Tuesday, November 6..... Robinson (e-reserve—remainder of chapter)

Thursday, November 8..... Chase-Dunn and Grimes (e-mail)

Tuesday, November 13..... Marx (handout);

..... Robinson (this and remaining readings are from his book), Introduction and Chapter 1

Thursday, November 15..... Robinson, 33-53

Tuesday, November 20..... Robinson, 54-84

Thursday, November 22..... *No Class—Thanksgiving*

Tuesday, November 27..... Robinson, 85-102

Thursday, November 29..... Robinson, 102-125

Tuesday, December 4..... Robinson, 125-144

Thursday, December 6..... Robinson, 145-160

Tuesday, December 11..... Robinson, 161-178

FINAL (THIRD) PAPER ASSIGNMENT DUE NO LATER THAN FIDAY, DECEMBER 21.