

SOCIOLOGY 301  
AMERICAN SOCIETY

Instructor: Chuck Hunt  
Time: 2-3:20 MW  
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### I Course Purpose and Content

Sociology 301, American Society, is a topic so vast that it must be focused in order to produce a manageable course. We will focus this class by investigating a complex phenomenon of ideology, the presentation of U.S. history in U.S. High School classes and U.S. High School textbooks. We will use the text by James Loewen entitled "Lies My Teacher Told Me". The course will investigate a number of topic areas in U.S. history and how they are taught in U.S. high schools. This investigation will include an inquiry into the history experience of each student taking the course and a critique by that student of her/his experience. Further, students will be required to investigate a topic in an Oregon Department of Education approved textbook and critique its presentation in a final paper.

The purpose of this course is multifaceted. (1) The course intends to increase the student's understanding of U.S. history and sociology. (2) The course is intended to increase the student's critical abilities to evaluate history and historical instruction. (3) We intend to discuss a number of major social themes of U.S. history and sociology. (4) The course is intended to assist the student in applying the Sociological Imagination to her/his own life, life experience and education. (5) We hope that the course will assist those who might intend to teach in high school, or who will eventually be teachers, to evaluate and promote quality instruction.

This course will begin with a "field trip" to the library to look at the treatment of Columbus and Pre-Columbian America in a number of high school history texts including a number of Oregon Department of Education approved textbooks. We will also look at the treatment of Cherokee Indians in the 1830s by the State of Georgia and the U.S. government under Andrew Jackson. The second section of the course will discuss racism and U.S. history. This section will include a discussion of Thomas Jefferson and the question of race in U.S. history. We will also examine John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, Reconstruction and the rise of segregation in the South. The third section of the course will look at labor history and social class. This section will include a look at social movements in U.S. history and history textbooks. In the fourth section we will focus upon the recent past and its disappearance from U.S. history texts and teaching. In this section we will look at the Viet Nam War. In the fifth section we will examine relatively recent events including the U.S. administration's "War on Terror", the events of September 11, 2001, and attempt to place the student's life experience in an

historical context. This section will include a brief history of torture and its development and practice since WWII by the U.S., its agencies and allies. In the final and sixth section we will discuss your experiences in high school history instruction, why history is taught this way, and how to improve high school U.S. history instruction.

## II. Course Textbooks

1. Loewen, James. *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.
2. A variety of high school history textbooks obtained from the library, relatives, kept from one's own experience, etc.
3. Konopacki and Buhle. *A People's History of American Empire*.
4. Handouts that will be given to the class when appropriate.

## III. Course Evaluation

1. The student is expected to attend class acquainted with the materials and readings assigned for the week. Attendance is required and will be taken. Students attending less than 70% of classes, for whatever reason, will fail this course. Attendance will constitute 15% of the student's final grade.
2. The student is required to submit a 5 page essay discussion of the student's experience in history instruction in high school. This paper is due Wednesday, May 5, in class. It will constitute 30% of the final class grade.
3. The student is required to submit an essay that discusses a specific topic and how it is treated in an Oregon Department of Education approved high school history text. The paper will be approximately 2000 words. This essay is due on Wednesday, June 3, 2009, in class. This paper will constitute 30% of the final class grade.
4. The student is expected to keep a journal of the class readings. This journal is to be submitted in class on the dates listed below (April 22 & May 20) and will be returned promptly. This requirement will constitute 25% of the class grade. The complete journal must be turned in with the final paper on Wednesday, June 3, 2009.
5. No incompletes will be given without prior discussion and permission from the instructor in this course.

## IV. Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1 & 2: March 30-April 8: Discussion of course content and requirements; imaginary field trip to the library; indigenous peoples and US history textbooks. Who really is this fellow named Cristobal Colon?

Film: *How the West Was Lost: The Trail of Tears*

Readings: Loewen, Chapters 1-4, pp. 11-136; AE, pp. 1-17.

Week 3 & 4: April 13-22: Race and Racism in high school history textbooks: Thomas Jefferson, John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Do students emerge from high school history with an understanding of race and racism and the role these concepts have played in U.S. history?

Film: *Jefferson's Blood*

Readings: Loewen, Chapters 5, 6 and 7, pp. 137-199; AE, pp. 151-176, 31-52.

READING JOURNALS DUE WEDNESDAY, April 22, 2009, IN CLASS.

Week 5 & 6: April 27-May 6: Labor history and social class, American Exceptionalism. Do students receive a reasonable education in social movements and, in particular, the labor movement in the U.S.?

Film: The River Ran Red

Readings: Loewen, Chapter 7, pp. 200-213; AE, pp. 18-27, 78-81, 103-114.

ESSAY DISCUSSING HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY EXPERIENCE DUE WEDNESDAY, MAY 5 IN CLASS.

Week 7 & 8: May 11-20: The recent past: Vietnam. Do Students have a context in their understanding of the recent past in order to understand their contemporary experience?

Film: Two Days in October

Readings: Loewen, Chapters 9 and 10, pp. 238-270; AE, pp. 53-74, 160-208.

READING JOURNALS DUE WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2009, IN CLASS.

Week 9: May 27: Are current events understood in a realistic and informed historic context?

Film: Taxi to the Dark Side

Readings: Loewen, Chapter 8, pp. 214-237. Handout: Chapter One of "The Shock Doctrine", Naomi Klein; AE, pp. 231-258.

Week 10: June 1-3 Discussion of US history. Why do we teach history this way?

Readings: Loewen, Chapter 11 and 12, pp. 271-318. AE, pp. 259-263.

READING JOURNALS AND FINAL PAPERS DUE: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2009, IN CLASS.

#### ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is required in this class. Students are expected to attend all class meetings and to participate in class. An attendance sheet will be circulated in the first half of the class and you are requested to initial your name and enter the required personal password to indicate your presence. If you need to leave early, please talk to the Graduate Teaching Fellow or the Instructor in order to determine whether you will receive credit for attendance for the day you must leave early. Please arrive on time.

Attendance is 15% of the final grade. A minimum of 70% of the class must be attended by the student. With 20 meetings of the class in ten weeks this means that you are required to attend a minimum of 14 classes. You are allowed to be absent from three classes without losing any credit and without an excuse. Thus, the fourth, fifth and sixth

classes missed will result in lost credit from 20%. Each of the fourth, fifth and sixth classed missed will be five points lost on the final grade. It is assumed that the three permitted absences will take care of most outside requirements for students such as doctor's appointments, athletic engagements, etc.

I always assume that students are honest and do not engage in academic dishonesty. On occasion in the past I have been disappointed in this assumption. Anyone who signs in for someone not present or who gives their password to another student in order to be signed in when they are not present is engaged in academic dishonesty. The result of such behavior will be dismissal from the course and a failing grade. I expect all students to practice academic honesty and I am confident that I will not have to take any such action.

#### STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

Recently, it has come to my attention that academic dishonesty has become quite widespread and commonly practiced on U.S. and Canadian University campuses. Please be aware that academic dishonesty is not acceptable in this class. If you have any doubt about what constitutes academic honesty and academic dishonesty, please discuss these issues with your instructor or GTF. It will be assumed, in this classroom, that you are aware of the fundamental requirements of academic honesty and deviation from the requirements of academic honesty and the practice of academic dishonesty will result in failure in this class and dismissal from the classroom.