Objectives:

This course is open to undergraduate and graduate students. It examines the role played by culture in explaining persistent inequality in the distribution of resources and power. We will first explore the theoretical tools needed before attacking the problem from various angles. We will analyze how contests for the definitions of reality affect social movements, social problems, and politics more generally. We will explore how these battles are fought at the individual, organizational, and macro levels, in the realms of the mass media and the shaping of public opinion. Other issues to be examined include the role of cultural tastes and cultural consumption in social reproduction, cultural resistance and hegemony, and how race, class, and gender shape identity. We will end with discussion of ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, national identity, and globalization in contemporary societies. Throughout the course, students will be asked to apply the conceptual tools and knowledge acquired to make sense of their experiences and of their immediate and remote environments.

Requirements:

- Cumulative final in-class exam, worth 35 percent of the final grade
- Four assignments (4 pages max. each), worth 40 percent (10 percent each) (see description below). Due dates: October 14, 28; November 29; December 15.
- Class participation and attendance, worth 25 percent

Class participation entails active engagement with the readings and participation in the section. You are required to contribute at least ten postings, evenly dispersed throughout the semester, to the online discussion forum, where you mobilize the tools and knowledge acquired in the seminar to analyze your environment. You are invited to include attachments of textual, visual, or audio material to illustrate or help elucidate the material presented in class. At least 50 percent of your posts should be responses to other students. The TFs will act as forum moderators.
The course website contains this syllabus, links to the online readings, the online homework assignments, course discussion forums, and other course-related resources. It is located at:

http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~soc154/

Readings:


A packet of readings also should be purchased from Harvard Printing Services. Please go online to http://www.uis.harvard.edu/digital_print_services/ to place your order. They will contact you about when and where to pick up your order. Several readings are available on the web. You can also find the material on reserve in the library in William James Hall, 33 Kirkland Street.

**Week 1 (September 20 and 22): Introduction**


**PART 1: DEFINING THE QUESTIONS AND THE CONCEPTUAL TOOLS**

**Week 2 (September 27 and 29): Conceptualizing Culture**


**Week 3 (October 4 and 6): Marxist Approaches to Culture**


Movie Fahrenheit 9/11 to be discussed in sections.

**Week 4 (October 11 and 13): Conceptualizing Power, Culture, and Inequality**


Assignment 1: Analyze texts by Parsons and Foucault (posted on website) illustrating different conceptions of power. Post paper on the website on October 14 by noon. Then, for each text, make at least one brief annotation and respond to at least one other student’s annotation using the online Collaborative Annotation Tool. Your annotations are due before the section meets on the 15th.

**PART 2: CONTESTED DEFINITIONS OF REALITY: SOCIAL MOVEMENT, SOCIAL PROBLEMS, AND POLITICS**

**Week 5 (October 18 and 20): Framing, Social Problems, and Social Movements**


Movie on the African American civil rights movement, Freedom on My Mind, to be discussed in section. Be ready to analyze a segment of the movie using the conceptual tools proposed by Snow, using the questions provided on the website.

**Week 6 (October 25 and 27): Media, Politics, and Public Opinion**


Assignment 2: Analyze one aspect of the electoral coverage (a Sunday morning show, an in-depth analysis in a popular news magazine, or several NYT or Washington Post op-ed pieces) to compare the use of strategic and issue frames. Drawing on Cappela and Jamieson, discuss: how useful are these frames to make sense of the coverage? Are other frames being used? Post paper on forum by October 28, noon, and post replies before section meetings on the 29th.

PART 3: INEQUALITY AND CULTURAL DIFFERENTIATION

Week 7 (November 1 and 3): Inequality, Boundaries, and Cultural Consumption


Guest speaker: Patricia Banks, Department of Sociology, Harvard University. “What does the African-American middle class put on the wall?”

Week 8 (November 8 and 9): Subcultures and Resistance


**Week 9 (November 15 and 17): Racial and Class Boundaries**


**Week 10 (November 22 and 24): Gender and Ethnicity**


**Week 11 (November 29 and December 1): The Cultural Construction of Poverty**


PART 4: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND CONVERGENCE

Week 12 (December 6 and 8): Relativism, Ethnocentrism, and Imperialism


Week 13 (December 13 and 15): National Identity and Globalization


Assignment 4: Post and analyze textual, visual, or audio material that illustrates the material covered over the past two weeks. Possible themes include the construction of American national identity; globalization and cultural homogenization; and various forms of cultural imperialism. Post on December 15 by noon; engage in forum discussion before section.

Week 14 (December 20): Wrapping up