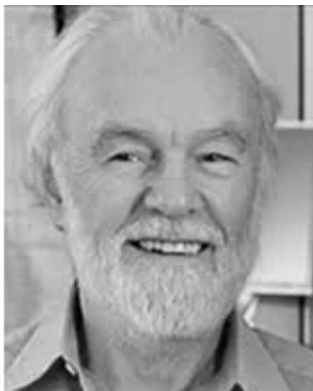
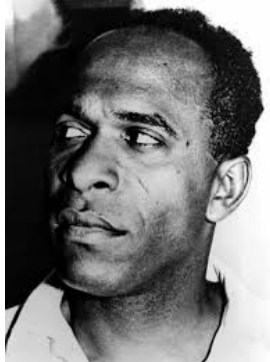
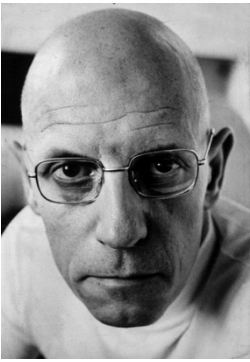


# Seeing Society • Contemporary Theories of Power

SOC 490 • Fall 2018 • Tu/Th 2:00-3:15 • Graham 310  
Professor Levenson • Office 327 • [zachary.levenson@uncg.edu](mailto:zachary.levenson@uncg.edu)  
Office hours Th 10-12 (<https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/xpakt>)

“If what we can perceive with our senses delimits what is politically possible, then how do we make legible forms of power that are invisible?”

—Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (2018)



Welcome back to the world of social theory. In this class, we will remain intently focused on one of the central questions that emerged from the writings of classical sociological theorists: *How is power exercised in the modern world?* In order to answer this question, of course, we will need to think through what exactly power is; what it means to exercise it; who would do such a thing; over whom; by what means; and to what ends. And of course, some of the theorists we will read reject some of these formulations I've just laid out. Foucault, for example, insists that power isn't something wielded "over" other people. But what else is there? You get the point.

This class assumes a working familiarity with the writings of thinkers like Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, but I don't expect you to be experts. These writers taught us much, but of course, their work was only a point of departure. As white, cis-heterosexual, male Europeans, they were never particularly concerned with the ethics of colonialism, for example, which is precisely where we'll start. We'll then return briefly to Marx and think through a number of possible trajectories that have developed out of his writings. We will see how subsequent writers have built upon and reformulated some of his key insights. Instead of deciding to accept or reject certain theorists, we'll ask what they have to give to us, and what we should leave in the dustbin of history. Or to repurpose one of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce's old titles, we'll be asking what is living and what is dead in classical social theory.

The question of power is an enormous one, and we can only begin to address it over the course of the semester. Where to even start? I've organized this syllabus around three central themes. These aren't really themes so much as ways power is exercised, or at the very least manifests in the contemporary world. Here are three, but there are countless others. We'll begin with a discussion of *violence*. While some theorists, most notably Pierre Bourdieu, have theorized forms of violence that transcend the physical realm, we'll be thinking about violence as the deliberate exercise of physical force. If you were to smack your neighbor square in the mouth, you'd be exercising power. But who else does so? Are there entities larger than individuals that deploy violence? What happens when we think of capital or the state as the agents of coercion?

Second, we'll shift to a discussion of *stigmatization*: power enacted through the symbolic marking of a person or group of people as inferior in relation to those doing the enacting. This is a convenient lens for thinking of a number of phenomena. In some sense, all social interaction contains moments of stigmatization. But there are also more specific types of stigma we can observe. Think about the way certain groups of people are stigmatized for their poverty, class position, or immigration status. And stigmatization is obviously a central part of racializing, gendering, and sexing populations. But who enacts these processes? Do they actually do so deliberately? And for what reason(s)? These are some of the questions we'll explore in this part of the class.

Third and finally, we'll look at *surveillance*. You're probably thinking of surveillance cameras in stores, or even closed-circuit cameras mounted in everything from lampposts to ATMs. But what else surveils? And are we all surveilled equally? How is surveillance refracted through categories like class, race, ethnicity, immigration status, sex, gender, and bodily ability? Why do bosses surveil their employees in workplaces around the world, even following them into their homes after they leave for the day? Why do lawmakers seem to care so much about the ways people enact or perform gendered and sexed identities? We know that police disproportionately surveil

people of color, and above all, black people, but why? In the service of what kind of project? Given all of these various instances of surveillance, how should we think about the concept more generally? And what does it tell us about power?

As you can probably tell already, these are enormous questions, and as such, most of the readings we'll be doing this semester are quite dense. Above all, I expect you to spend an adequate amount of time with the texts. I tend to print them out and mark them up, scrawling notes in the margins and underlining key statements. You may choose to color-code, or else you might want to do all of this on a tablet. I really don't care how you do it; I care *that* you do it. We will be learning how to read carefully, and as such, this is a major part of your grade:

1. **Attendance, reading assignments, and discussion questions (30 %):** This is not the class to skim on the readings. It's a small seminar, and I will be treating it as such. I will rarely lecture after the first day; instead, I expect engaged participation throughout each meeting. Yes, we all have our off-days. But I do expect you to be present most of the time. This means both active listening and above all *engagement*. This class is a rare opportunity in a large university: an opportunity to actually engage in dialogue. And that's exactly what we'll be doing. (Please do so respectfully, but I do expect substantial differences of opinion, politics, and otherwise. Sharp disagreements are fine; disrespectful behavior is not.) In preparation for every class meeting, you are *required* to submit two things: first, one or two discussion questions; and second, what you find to be the most meaningful sentence from the day's readings. While I will only be grading these on a *pass/not pass* basis, the simple fact of submission doesn't automatically earn you a pass. I expect you to engage deeply with these texts. Yes, they're quite difficult; but that's why I'm asking you to pose questions about them! And no, "What does \_\_\_\_ mean?" does not qualify as an acceptable question. Like I said, engage *deeply*. If you are having trouble figuring out what this means, I'm happy to chat during office hours!
2. **Class leadership (25 %):** During the first class session, each student will select a class in which they will lead. Class leadership means:
  - a. Preparing a **presentation** with which to begin the session. This is *not* an opportunity to prove to me that you did the reading and summarize the day's selection for the class. We've presumably all done the reading. Instead, I want you to do something quite difficult: extract an argument from the text. What is the author trying to argue? How do they do so? What concepts do they develop in the service of this argument? And finally, do you find it convincing? What are its merits and what are its limits? Presentations should last roughly ten minutes and be accompanied by either hand-outs or slides.
  - b. Preparing a **list of questions** to be used in class. This needn't be exhaustive. Two or three thoughtful questions will do if you formulate them well. Your final question must relate to at least one previous reading (though students covering Fanon or Marx can ignore this point).

- c. Leading the discussion as a **moderator**. While your questions will do most of the work for you, it's up to you to facilitate the flow of discussion. Of course, it's up to your classmates to actually discuss, but it's your duty to moderate the process. If one or two people are monopolizing the conversation, try to draw others into the discussion. I'll of course help where it's needed.
3. **Final paper (45 %):** This is, after all, a writing intensive class, and so it's only fitting that writing comprises the most important part of your grade. But what exactly does this entail?
- a. First, I want to see you lay out a viable **idea for the paper (5 %)**. This is due before class begins on September 11. This should be no longer than a half page single-spaced and submitted via Canvas. If you're indecisive and have two or three ideas, try writing them all up, and even feel free to submit all three. And above all, use my office hours. If you're having trouble coming up with ideas come see me. But remember, the theme of this course is power, and power is everywhere. You can quite literally write about anything you want as long as you engage course material!
  - b. Second, after you've thought about your topic in relation to a few more readings, I want you to write it up as an **abstract (10 %)**. This means laying out the argument you (at least *think*) you'll be making and referring to at least three theorists we've covered by that point. This is due in class on September 20. We will be workshopping these in groups of four, and so I want you to have something on which to get feedback from your classmates. This also means bringing four hard copies to class: one for me and two for your peer reviewers.
  - c. Third, I want you to think long and hard about two things. How does the feedback you received from your peers necessitate a rethinking of your argument, or even your very topic? And second, how do the additional authors we've read up to that point force you to revise your project? Based on these two questions, I want you to write up a two-page (double-spaced) **outline (10 %)** of your entire paper, including an introductory statement of your argument, the argument itself (working through your chosen topic while engaging theorists covered in class), and concluding remarks. This is due in class on October 30. As before, we will be doing peer review and workshopping your arguments. And once again you have an opportunity to revise them before meeting with me during office hours and finally...
  - d. Fourth, writing the **final paper (25 %)** itself. This should be between 10 and 15 pages, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and in 12-point font. (No wacky fonts. If you're in doubt, use Times New Roman. I hate reading wacky fonts. Don't do it.) While sometimes the contents of final papers can be a mystery until you actually sit down to write them, that won't be the case this time around. You've just spent the better part of the semester formulating (and twice reformulating!) your argument. Now you just need to write it up. Easy! Or is it? You are required

to use at least five theorists covered in this class. These will be due via Canvas on December 1.

## ***Course Schedule***

### **August 14:**

- Introductory remarks

## **Part I: Violence**

### **August 16:**

- Frantz Fanon. 2005 [1961]. "On Violence." Pp. 1-26 in *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove.

### **August 21:**

- Frantz Fanon. 2005 [1961]. "On Violence." Pp. 26-52 in *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove, 26-52.

### **August 23:**

- In-class short film: "*Borom Sarret* [The Wagoner]" (d. Ousmane Sembène, 1963).
- Andrea Dahlberg. 2003. "On the Fortieth Anniversary of "*Borom Sarret*," *Film-Philosophy* 7(13). Available online (<http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol7-2003/n13dahlberg>).
- Ato Sekyi-Otu. 1996. *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 87-101.

### **August 28:**

- Karl Marx. 1976 [1867]. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*. New York: Penguin, 896-926

### **August 30:**

- David Harvey. 2003. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 137-61.

### **September 4:**

- Coulthard, Glen Sean. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1-24.

### **September 6:**

- Nikhil Pal Singh. 2016. "On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation." *Social Text* 34(3):27-44.

### **September 11:**

- Silvia Federici. 2004. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia, 163-205.
- *Ideas for papers due!*

**September 13:**

- Nicholas De Genova, "The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement." 2010. Pp. 33-65 in *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, edited by Nicholas De Genova and Nathalie Peutz. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Benjamin Hart. 2018 "Trump's Draconian Immigration Policies Highlight Obama's Missteps." *New York Magazine*, June 20. Available online (<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/06/trumps-immigration-policies-highlight-obamas-missteps.html>).

**September 18:**

- Wendy Brown. 2010. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone, 107-33.

**September 20:**

- First writing workshop: Abstracts due in class!

**Part II: Stigmatization****September 25:**

- Erving Goffman. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simone & Schuster, 41-73.

**September 27:**

- Erving Goffman. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simone & Schuster, 73-104.

**October 2:**

- Gareth Stedman Jones. 1971. *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society*. Oxford: Clarendon. Selections TBD.

**October 4:**

- Herbert J. Gans. 1994. "Positive Functions of the Undeserving Poor: Uses of the Underclass in America." *Politics and Society* 22(3):269-83.
- Loïc Wacquant. 2007. "Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality" *Thesis Eleven* 91(1):66-77.

**October 9:**

- Fall Break NO CLASS

**October 11:**

- Frantz Fanon. 2008 [1951]. "The Lived Experience of the Black Man." Pp. 89-119 in *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove.

**October 16:**

- Michele Wallace. 2015 [1978]. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Verso. Selections TBD.

#### **October 18:**

- Michele Wallace. 2015 [1978]. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Verso. Selections TBD.

#### **October 23:**

- Imogen Tyler. 2013. *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London: Zed. Selections TBD.

#### **October 25:**

- Imogen Tyler. 2013. *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London: Zed. Selections TBD.

#### **October 30:**

- Second writing workshop: Outlines due in class!

### **Part III: Surveillance**

#### **November 1:**

- Michel Foucault. 1995 [1975]. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage, 170-94.

#### **November 6:**

- Michel Foucault. 1995 [1975]. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage, 195-228.

#### **November 8:**

- Simone Brown. 2015. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 31-62.

#### **November 13:**

- Simone Brown. 2015. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 89-130.

#### **November 15:**

- Antonio Gramsci. 1971 [1929-35]. "Americanism and Fordism." Pp. 277-318 in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International
- Charlie Boothe. 2018. "Potential Teacher Strike Looms over West Virginia." *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, 29 January. Available online ([http://www.bdonline.com/news/potential-teacher-strike-looms-over-west-virginia/article\\_32f4a9f4-04a1-11e8-99f2-7f31dc816267.html](http://www.bdonline.com/news/potential-teacher-strike-looms-over-west-virginia/article_32f4a9f4-04a1-11e8-99f2-7f31dc816267.html))
- National Public Radio. 2010. "Can Bosses Do That? As It Turns Out, Yes They Can." *Morning Edition*. Available online (<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123024596>).

**November 20:**

- Toby Beauchamp. 2009. "Artful Concealment and Strategic Visibility: Transgender Bodies and U.S. State Surveillance After 9/11." *Surveillance and Society* 6(4):356-66.
- Toby Beauchamp. 2014. "Surveillance." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1(1-2):208-10.
- Toby Beauchamp. 2018. "In Security." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 24(1):13-17.
- J. Bryan Lowder. 2016. "North Carolina's Anti-LGBT Law Encourages Dangerous Gender Surveillance." *Slate*. Available online ([http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2016/03/25/north\\_carolina\\_s\\_hb2\\_encourages\\_gender\\_policing\\_on\\_trans\\_folks\\_and\\_everyone.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2016/03/25/north_carolina_s_hb2_encourages_gender_policing_on_trans_folks_and_everyone.html)).

**November 22:**

- Thanksgiving NO CLASS

**Part IV: Conclusion****November 27:**

- Concluding remarks

**November 29:**

- Reading Day NO CLASS

**December 3:**

- Final paper due (via Canvas)