

University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill

Soci111-001 Human Societies

Summer I 2008

Professor François Nielsen

1 Times, Places & Contacts

Classes Meet

- Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu 3:00–5:00 PM in GL 319

Instructor

- Professor François Nielsen – Email: francois_nielsen@unc.edu Office: Hamilton 163 Hours: by appointment Phone: 962-5064 Fax: 962-7568
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2 Course Description & Goals

Human Societies is an introduction to *macrosociology*, the study of entire societies past and present. In macrosociology, the focus is less on the behavior and attitudes of isolated individuals than on the explanation of social structure and patterns of social change. We will seek such explanations within the framework of the modern *ecological-evolutionary theory* of social development. Ecological-evolutionary theory explains social and cultural characteristics of societies (such as the degree of social inequality, family structure, the position of women, the degree of division of labor, and even the nature of religious beliefs and the games people play) as resulting from the combined influences of the prior state of the society (its “history” and “culture”), fundamental behavioral propensities that are part of the common genetic heritage of our species (“human nature”), and features of the biophysical and social environment in which the society is situated. Ecological-evolutionary theory further asserts that the level of subsistence technology (for example, hunting and gathering, plant cultivation with the hoe, plant cultivation with the plow, industrial technology) is a prime determinant of other societal characteristics. As a result of taking this course, students should be able to apply this ecological-evolutionary perspective to understanding and explaining similarities and differences among the major types of human societies that have existed, including hunting and gathering, horticultural, agrarian, fishing, herding, maritime, industrial, industrializing, and Marxist-Leninist societies. (These terms will be defined later in the course.)

Another focus of the course is on the biological bases of human nature in view of recent progress in *sociobiology* (also called *evolutionary psychology*), which has been defined as “the application of evolutionary biology to the social behavior of animals, including *Homo sapiens*” (David Barash). We will see how sociobiological thinking illuminates behaviors that are at the core of social relations such as parental behavior, sexual development, incest taboos, differences in sexual strategies between men and women, dominance hierarchies, cooperation, and altruism. We will see in particular how the approach helps understanding differences in orientation, life-strategies, and behavior between the sexes. This material is rather

new, still somewhat controversial, and not guaranteed to be politically correct! I believe, however, that sociobiology is not only a genuine new scientific paradigm that is revolutionizing the social sciences, but also the basis for a humanistic approach to male-female relations and for grounding the community of the human species beyond ethnic and other particularistic divisions.

There are two intellectual aspects of the course worth noting. First, the sort of reasoning that the course uses repeatedly involves the behavior of *groups*, such as whole societies or social classes. It is not always easy to think in those terms, because we are accustomed (and perhaps even “hardwired”) to explain the behavior of individuals in terms of their interests, beliefs, motivations, etc. If you find the content of the course disconcerting in that way please talk about it with the instructor or TA.

Another issue is *ethnocentrism*, the widespread human tendency to believe in the superiority of one’s own ethnic group and culture. Since the course focuses on explaining variations among societies, we will inevitably make many comparisons between societies, in order to explain similarities and differences between them. Many interesting comparisons will involve the United States. For example we will want to ask: Compared to other industrial societies like those of Western Europe, are the United States more or less democratic? Is the country more or less dependent on foreign imports? Are Americans more or less wealthy? More or less religious? Do they have more or less opportunities? And always we will ask: Why? The outcomes of such comparisons may be flattering or unflattering to this country. The outcomes of some comparisons may be surprising in the sense that they don’t fit with preconceived ideas that we may have about the standing of this society relative to others. These preconceptions can be powerful and prevent us from examining comparative materials objectively and logically. So we need to be alert to this pitfall when we discuss the United States relative to other countries.

3 Readings

3.1 Books

Readings are from the following books, available at the bookstore:

Patrick NOLAN & Gerhard LENSKI. 2005. *Human Societies*. (10th edition.) Paradigm Publishers. Paper.

Steven PINKER. 2002. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. New York: Viking. Paper.

Jared DIAMOND. 2005. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New edition. Norton. Paper. (The earlier edition is fine, too.)

3.2 Class Notes

The class notes and the exhibits (figures and tables) that I show in class can be found on the World Wide Web at the address:

<http://www.unc.edu/~nielsen>

Click on the link for Soci111 and then on Class Notes in the side bar. You can download or print these notes as you wish. I must reserve the right to revise/update the notes at any time during the session. The date of last modification is provided at the end of each module.

4 Exams & Requirements

4.1 Honor Code

THE HONOR CODE WILL BE IN FORCE FOR ALL EXAMINATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

For more information on student duties under the Honor Code please see

<http://honor.unc.edu/students/rights.html>

Please note in particular the following section:

[It is the responsibility of students] To maintain the confidentiality of examinations by divulging no information concerning an examination, directly or indirectly, to another student yet to write that same examination.

However for the team project you are allowed (and encouraged) to freely cooperate with members of your team and other students in the class, as well as consult any sources (as long as they are acknowledged).

4.2 Requirements

The midterm and the final are multiple-choice exams. You need to bring

- a “bubble sheet” for electronic scanning, available free of charge at Student Stores
- a pencil (#2 preferred) with an *effective* eraser (soft, pink, ..., *not* hard and all dried up!) so you can erase your answer completely if you change your mind

For examples of multiple-choice questions of the type used in the exams click on

- a sampler of multiple-choice questions.

Your final grade in the class will be based on three requirements.

(1) Midtem (30% of course grade)

The midterm will take place during regular class time on

- Wed 28 May (during class time)

It consists of 80 to 90 multiple choice questions.

(2) Final (40% of course grade)

The final will take place on

- Tue 17 Jun 3:00–5:30 (in practice you may be done before 5:30)

The final will consist of 140 to 150 multiple-choice questions. The final is cumulative, with about $1/4$ to $1/3$ of the questions pertaining to materials covered before the midterm, the rest pertaining to materials covered after the midterm.

(3) Individual or Team Assignment (30% of course grade)

This assignment consists in preparing and giving a short presentation on a specific society (either a society that no longer exists but is known to us through documents, such as a preindustrial society, or an existing industrial or developing country). We will decide on teams and topics of presentations on the first and second days of class.

5 Outline & Readings Schedule

Key to Readings:

HS: Human Societies Chapters 1–14; read chapter (HS 1, HS 2, etc.) of the text by date indicated (except on the first day of class).

BS: The Blank Slate Read:

Preface (pp vii–xiii)
 Chapter 1 (pp 5–13),
 Intro to Part III (pp 137–139)
 Choose one chapter among Chapters 8 (pp 141–158), 9 (pp 159–173), 10 (pp 174–185), or 11 (pp 186–194),
 Chapter 14 (pp 241–268),
 Intro to Part V (pp 281–282)
 Chapter 18 (pp 337–371),
 Chapter 19 (pp 372–399)

between BS–*begin* and BS–*finish*.

GGs: Guns, Germs, and Steel read Prologue (pp 13–32), Chapters 4 (pp 85–92), 5 (pp 93–103), 10 (pp 176–191), 14 (pp 265–292), 17 (pp 334–353), and 19 (pp 376–401) during period between GGS–*begin* and GGS–*finish*.

Week 1

Tue 13 May – Class 1 The human situation M1 & Human societies as systems M2

READINGS: HS1, HS2

Wed 14 May – Class 2 Levels of selection & altruism M3

READINGS: BS–*begin*

Thu 15 May – Class 3 Altruism & relatedness M4

READINGS: BS–*continue*

Week 2

Mon 19 May – Class 4 Altruism & reciprocity M5 & Film *Sex Unknown* SU

READINGS: BS–*continue*

Tue 20 May – Class 5 Reproduction strategies & sex roles M6

READINGS: BS–*finish*

Wed 21 May – Class 6 Evolution of human societies M7 & Types of human societies M8

READINGS: HS3, HS4, GGS–*begin*

Thu 22 May – Class 7 Hunting & gathering societies M9

READINGS: HS5, GGS–*continue*

Week 3

Mon 26 May – Memorial Day

Tue 27 May – Class 8 Horticultural societies M10

READINGS: HS6, GGS–*finish*

Wed 28 May – Class 9 Midterm

READINGS: All previous

Thu 29 May – Class 10 Agrarian societies M11

READINGS: HS7

PRESENTATION 1: Alutiiq, a fishing society (Jeanne, Harrison)

Week 4

Mon 2 Jun – Class 11 Evolutionary bypaths M12

READINGS: HS8

Tue 3 Jun – Class 12 The industrial revolution M13

READINGS: HS9

PRESENTATION 2: France, an industrial society (Kathryn, Andi)

Wed 4 Jun – Class 13 Industrial societies: technology & economy M14

READINGS: HS10

Thu 5 Jun – Class 14 Industrial societies: ideologies & polity M15

READINGS: HS11

PRESENTATION 3: Japan, an industrial society (Aquina, Joe)

Week 5

Mon 9 Jun – Class 15 Industrial societies: social stratification M16

READINGS: HS12

PRESENTATION 4: Australia, an industrial society (Leah, Shannon)

Tue 10 Jun – Class 16 Industrial societies: family & role of women M17

READINGS: HS13

Wed 11 Jun – Class 17 Industrializing societies M18

READINGS: HS14

PRESENTATION 5: Nigeria, an industrializing horticultural society (Latorya, Alex)

Thu 12 Jun – Class 18 cont'd

Final Week

Tue 17 Jun – Final 3:00–5:30 PM

Last modified 21 May 2008