

# Soc 103: Sociological Theory

Fall 2022  
Tufts University  
Mondays & Wednesdays, 3:00-4:15 pm  
Braker Hall 226

Associate Professor Freeden Blume Oeur (he/him)

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Office: Braker Hall 320

Office Hours: [Virtual sign-up on Calendly](#), Tuesdays 10-11 am and Thursdays 1-2 pm

**Updated 11-29-2022 with post-Thanksgiving changes**



## Welcome

Sociological theory has long had its skeptics who have critiqued it variously for being dated, too abstract, too grounded in the idea of classics and a canon, and for its Eurocentrism. Yet it remains a foundation of the discipline and a requirement for the major. We use the frame of “seeing” (the Greek root of theory is “theorein,” meaning “to see”) to guide our *pluriversal* approach to studying major topics for social thought, including modernity, capitalism, violence, race, and gender.\* Pluriversality recognizes that all theory is incomplete, or has its blind spots; and so our course will place alternative or historically marginalized *standpoints* (critical race, feminist, Southern, subaltern) in conversation with—and in contentious debate with—dominant social frameworks with their Northern, US-centric, Eurocentric, and Metrocentric perspectives. We’ll think of theory as “social/science fiction,” which blends traditional social science (which stresses social divisions and analyzing information) and speculative fiction (which offers new social visions and urges imagination; *theorein* also means to speculate). Our hope is to help build a sociological theory that is more just, humane, creative, and insurgent—and one that helps you think about you and your place in the world.

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\* This approach draws inspiration from Ali Meghji, *Decolonizing Sociology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2021).

# The Basics

## Objectives

- To assess and critique visions of the social world using the information of social science and the imagination of science fiction.
- To use historically marginalized standpoints to critique traditional and normative social visions.
- To create intellectual dialogues between different theories.
- To apply theories to explain what's happening in the world right now.
- To demonstrate proficiency by writing short essays that create dialogues between theories, and fictional encounters.
- To consider the advantages and disadvantages of using visual metaphors for explanations of the social world, and to consider alternatives to those metaphors.

## Required Materials

All readings (book excerpts and journal articles) are available on the class Canvas page, except for one book, which is available for purchase at the campus bookstore:

- Ray, Victor. 2022. *On Critical Race Theory: Why It Matters & Why You Should Care*. New York: Random House.

## Assignments

All written assignments should be sent by email to Freeden. Please be sure to save your files as Word documents (not PDFs!), using the requested nomenclature. There is a mix of lower-stakes and higher-stakes assignments:

- **[20% of overall grade] Attendance and participation.** Come to class having read the assigned materials carefully and prepared to discuss and ask questions. Outside of COVID, other serious health concerns, or excused absences you discuss with Freeden, you can miss two classes without penalty. Each additional absence will deduct 2% from your overall course grade. There are many ways to participate in class. Since the class is a reasonable size, we will try our best to have a class wide discussion each time we meet.
- **[5%] Paper #1: "Theory and Me."** A brief 2-page reflection. Graded on a full-credit, partial-credit basis. **Due electronically by the start of class on Wednesday, September 21.**
- **[5%] Paper #2:** A 2-page outline of your choice of a fictional dialogue between 2 (or 3) theorists, or a short story piece of speculative fiction. Graded on a full-credit, partial-credit basis. **Due electronically at 5 pm on Tuesday, November 22.**

Larger stakes exams, graded on a traditional grading scale: A+ (100), A (94-99), A- (90-93), B+ (87-89), B (84-86), B- (80-83), C+ (77-79), C (74-76) . . .

- [45%] 3 Exams [15% each]. These are taken in-class, are non-cumulative, and take place every 4 weeks or so. The dates: Wednesday, October 12; Wednesday, November 16 (new date); and Monday, December 12 (the last class).
- [25%] Paper #3. An 8-page fictional dialogue or short story piece of speculative fiction. Due electronically at 5 pm on Monday, December 19.

### Grace Period

- You have 3 grace period days that you can use, however you like, across all 3 papers. You can use these days to submit assignments late without penalty. Please take advantage of these if you need. Except for extreme circumstances, extensions will not be given on written assignments. You don't need to let me know in advance that you're using the grace period for an assignment, but please do note this when you submit the assignment. You're responsible for keeping track of how many grace days you have.

### Academic Honesty

Our course will abide strictly by the guidelines laid out in the Tufts Statement of Academic Integrity, [available at this link](#).

A comprehensive review of university policies is [available at this link](#). Students are expected to follow all student responsibilities and to be aware of what constitutes academic integrity. This requires you to cite appropriately, understand what constitutes plagiarism, and consult me before submitting the same paper for this class and another (past or current) class. Possible violations of the policies outlined in the Statement of Academic Honesty will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students.

### Student Accessibility

Please reach out to me if you have any accommodations.

### Contacting Freeden

Feel free to email me but check first if the information you need is on this syllabus.

## Resources

### Basic Needs Security

I urge you to contact the Office of Student Success and Advising, your academic dean, or another campus official you trust, if you're having difficulty securing stable housing and sufficient food to eat, and especially if these difficulties are interfering with your academic performance. Please also feel free to reach out to me if I can help secure resources or put you in touch with others who can help.

## Canvas

Our class relies heavily on Canvas, so make sure [you can access our course page](#) and are familiar with how it works.

## Office Hours

You're welcome to stop by to talk about the class, school, or whatever else. The time will be more productive if you come prepared with specific concerns and questions. For these virtual office hours, you're encouraged to stop by with a classmate or in a small group; but the entire group has to agree before one person (and only one person has to) sign up. [You can sign up on Calendly](#). Please cancel immediately if you can't make it so someone else can sign up. Send me an email if you can't make my scheduled hours so we can find another time to meet.

## Annotating

This is the process of engaging actively with a text by marking it up. Use whatever annotation system works best for you. A helpful online annotation guide [is available here](#).

## Writing

There are many excellent writing resources available. As a general rule, I won't read drafts of written assignments. However, I'm happy to discuss outlines or written brainstorming in office hours, if you send me these in advance. Check out Purdue University's excellent [Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#), which covers all dimensions of writing. It has a great overview of ASA formatting and style, which you should use for papers in this class.

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein have excellent suggestions for writers. Check out their [templates for basic rhetorical devices in writing](#).

## Citing and Referencing

Use the [American Sociological Association's style](#) guide with your papers.

*The next four items were shared by the Deans of Academic Advising and Undergraduate Studies and applies to our course:*

## In-Person Classroom Health and Safety Policy

Tufts is not currently mandating mask-wearing in the classroom. I'll let you know if I'll be wearing a mask, and others should feel free to do so as well. We cannot know everyone's personal or familial health situations, so please take the steps you need to feel comfortable in an in-person setting. Should the university's masking requirements change, we will update our practices as well. Here is the link to the current Tufts COVID policy: [Healthy@Tufts | Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

## Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Tufts University values the diversity of our students, staff, and faculty and recognizes the important contribution each student makes to our unique community. Tufts is committed to providing equal access and support to all qualified students through the provision of reasonable accommodations so that each student may fully participate in the Tufts experience. If you have a disability that requires reasonable accommodations, please contact the StAAR Center (formerly Student Accessibility Services) at [StaarCenter@tufts.edu](mailto:StaarCenter@tufts.edu) or 617-627-4539 to make an appointment with an accessibility representative to determine appropriate accommodations. Please be aware that accommodations cannot be enacted retroactively, making timeliness a critical aspect for their provision.

**Academic Support at the StAAR Center**

The StAAR Center (formerly the Academic Resource Center and Student Accessibility Services) offers a variety of resources to all students (both undergraduate and graduate) in the Schools of Arts and Science, Engineering, the SMFA and Fletcher; services are free to all enrolled students. Students may make an appointment to work on any writing-related project or assignment, attend subject tutoring in a variety of disciplines, or meet with an academic coach to hone fundamental academic skills like time management or overcoming procrastination. Students can make an appointment for any of these services by [visiting the StAAR website](#).

**Student Support, including Mental Health**

As a student, there may be times when personal stressors or difficulties interfere with your academic performance or well-being. The Dean of Student Affairs Office offers support and care to undergraduates and graduate students who are experiencing difficulties, and can also aid faculty in their work with students. In addition, through Tufts’ Counseling and Mental Health Services (CMHS) students can access mental health support 24/7, and they can provide information on additional resources. CMHS also provides confidential consultation, brief counseling, and urgent care at no cost for all Tufts undergraduates as well as for graduate students who have paid the student health fee. To make an appointment, call 617-627-3360. Please [visit the CMHS website](#) to learn more about their services and resources.

**Schedule**

A complete bibliography will be uploaded to Canvas.

DATE	AGENDA	ASSIGNED MATERIALS
W 9-7	<i>No class</i>	--
M 9/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Welcome!</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review syllabus and expectations</li> <li>▪ Get oriented and excited</li> <li>▪ Discuss Paper #1, “Theory and Me,” due on W 9/21</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The German Ideology” (1845)</li> </ul>
W 9/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The personal and the political</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Raewyn Connell, <i>Southern Theory</i> (2007) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ch. 1, “Empire and the Creation of a Social Science”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
M 9/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The personal and the political</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ bell hooks, “Theory as Liberatory Practice” (1991)</li> </ul>
W 9/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Historical materialism: alienation and fetishism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Karl Marx, “The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844” (selections)</li> <li>▪ Karl Marx, “The Fetishism of the Commodities and the Secret Thereof” (1867) (selections)</li> <li>▪ <b><u>Paper 1: “Theory and Me,” due by the start of class (grace period in effect)</u></b></li> </ul>
M 9/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Historical materialism: Black Marxism and imperialism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Daniel Hirschman, “Why Sociology Needs Science Fiction” (2018)</li> <li>▪ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Princess Steel” (1908-1910?)</li> </ul>
W 9/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical race theory: interest convergence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Victor Ray, <i>Critical Race Theory</i> (2022) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Preface</li> <li>○ Introduction: Why Critical Race Theory Matters</li> <li>○ Ch. 5, “Interest Convergence”</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Derrick Bell, “The Space Traders” (1992)</li> </ul>
M 10/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical race theory: fundamentals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Victor Ray, <i>Critical Race Theory</i> (2022)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ch. 1, “The Social Construction of Race”</li> <li>○ Ch. 2, “Structural Racism”</li> <li>○ Ch. 3., “Colorblind Racism”</li> </ul>
W 10/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical race theory: extensions</li> <li>▪ <u>Dr. Victor Ray visits</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Victor Ray, <i>Critical Race Theory</i> (2022) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ch. 6, “Whiteness as Property”</li> <li>○ Ch. 7, “Counternarratives”</li> <li>○ Ch. 10, “Identity Politics”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
M 10/10	<i>No Class: Indigenous People’s Day</i>	--
W 10/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Exam #1</u></li> </ul>	--
M 10/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Race and capitalism: psychological wage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Black Reconstruction and the Racial Wage” (1935)</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">History this Week podcast: “Eric Foner and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. on Du Bois’s Black Reconstruction” (2022) (bonus episode only)</a>. Produced by former Tufts Sociology major Julia Press (’19)!</li> </ul>
W 10/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Race and capitalism: the environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ryan Cecil Jobson, “Dead Labor” (2021)</li> </ul>
M 10/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Race and capitalism: coloniality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentricism in Latin America” (2000)</li> </ul>
W 10/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Feminist Critiques: on Marxism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Catharine MacKinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State” (1982)</li> </ul>
M 10/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Feminist Critiques: Black feminist epistemology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Patricia Hill Collins, “The Outsider-Within” (1986) (selections)</li> </ul>

W 11/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feminist Critiques: race and species, the body, and reproduction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (1984)</li> </ul>
M 11/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self and Society: individualism and collectivism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>W. E. B. Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903): Ch. I, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"</li> </ul>
W 11/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self and Society: individualism and collectivism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karen Fields, "Individuality and the Intellectuals" (2002)</li> </ul>
M 11/14	<i>No Class: Sign-up office hours during normal class time</i>	--
W 11/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Exam #2 (new date)</b></li> </ul>	--
M 11/21	<p><i>No class: the readings listed here will be rescheduled for after Thanksgiving; update coming later</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domination: Legitimate authority</li> <li>Domination: Religious authority and capitalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><del>Max Weber, "The Types of Legitimate Domination" (1922) (skim)</del></li> <li>"The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism" (section on "Calvinism" only) (1905)</li> </ul>
Tu 11/22	<i>No Class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Paper #2 due electronically at 5pm (grace period in effect) (new deadline)</b></li> </ul>
W 11/23	<i>No Class: Thanksgiving break</i>	--
M 11/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domination: Discipline and the panopticon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Michel Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> (1975): Ch. 2, "The Gentle Way in Punishment" (selections).</li> </ul>



W 11/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Domination: Discipline and sexuality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Michel Foucault, <i>The History of Sexuality</i> (1978): Part 3, “Scientia Sexualis.”</li> </ul>
M 12/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Domination: Authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Max Weber, “The Types of Legitimate Domination” (1922) (skim)</li> <li>▪ “The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism” (section on “Calvinism” only) (1905)</li> </ul>
W 12/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Queer theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ursula Le Guin, “Mountain Ways” (1996)</li> </ul> <p>Optional and recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jonathan Ned Katz, “The Invention of Heterosexuality” (2007)</li> </ul>
M 12/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Exam #3</u></li> </ul>	--
M 12/19	No Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Paper #3 due electronically at 5 pm (grace period in effect)</u></li> </ul>