

University of Wisconsin, College of Letters and Science
Department of Sociology
American Society: How It Really Works 125:002, F2020

Credits	3
Instructor Title and Name	Professor Joel Rogers (he/him/his)
Instructor Availability	M 3:15-5:15 PM <i>or by appointment</i>
Instructor Email/Preferred Contact:	jerogers@wisc.edu, 608.262.4266 Assistant: Michelle Bright (she/her/hers), michelle.bright@wisc.edu, 608.890.2543
Teaching Assistants	Jody Knauss (he/him/his), jknauss@wisc.edu Yaowen Dong (he/him/his), dong8@wisc.edu
Canvas Course URL	https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/214944
Course Meeting Time and Location:	M 5:30-8p asynchronously available
Instructional Mode	Hybrid (lectures all asynchronous remote)
Office hours	Monday 3:15-5:15 PM

Course Description

What kind of society do we live in? What does it even mean to talk about a “kind” of society? We all know what it means to ask of a strange animal “what kind of animal/mineral is this?” But it is clear what it means to ask that question of a society. This is partly because societies involve people, with minds and language, whose behavior is harder to predict than inanimate physical objects or forces, or other animals. And it is partly because societies change much more rapidly than nature. A leopard cannot change its spots, at least not quickly. But societies can and often do become, for example, more or less productive in their economic organization, more or less equal in their distribution of opportunity to members, or more or less democratic, often very quickly.

This course provides an extended answer to the question of *What kind of a society is the United States?* It also explores the implications of that answer for understanding and making progress on solving some of the problems that confront America today. Our discussion revolves around five key values that most Americans believe this society should realize:

1. *Freedom*: the idea that members of the society should be able, to the greatest degree possible, to live their lives as they wish;
2. *Prosperity*: the idea that the society’s economy should generate the highest possible standard of living;
3. *Efficiency*: the idea that the economy should be maximally precise in allocating product to needs and wants, and maximally efficient in productive use of resources;
4. *Fairness*: the idea that members of the society should enjoy equal protection of the law and equal opportunity to make something of their lives;
5. *Democracy*: the idea that public decisions should reflect the collective will of equal citizens, not powerful and privileged elites.

Our central question is: *To what degree does contemporary American society realize these values and how might it do a better job?* A second but important question for us is: *How do social scientists go about answering such questions?*

Course Schedule & Materials

I truly regret that I won't be in seeing you in person this semester. But to make up for this lack of personal contact, I've augmented the course material available to you on canvas. For each lecture, you've got a long animated PPTX from me. In addition, you've got video recordings, with accompanying slides, from my recently deceased collaborator in developing this course, Erik Olin Wright. I'm also doubling my ordinary weekly office hours to 3:15-5:15 on Mondays, when I'll be available on Zoom. And if that doesn't work with your schedule, my assistant Michelle Bright can schedule another time for to talk.

Along with Canvas materials just mentioned, different chapters of the book we'll rely on for this course – *American Society: How It Really Works (AS)* – are assigned to different lectures. They're indicated in the schedule below, which also includes the dates of your exams.

AS Chs.

Introduction

1	9/14	1-2	Introduction to class, what kind of a society this is
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Part 1: Market capitalism

2	9/21	3-4	The market
3	9/28	5-6	Environment, transportation
4	10/5	7-8	Consumerism, health care
5	10/12	9-10	Finance, high road

Monday, October 19, 2020 - Midterm #1

Part 2: Fairness and inequality

6	10/19	11-12	Fairness, inequality, class
7	10/26	13-14	Poverty and its solution
8	11/2	15	Racial inequality
9	11/9	16	Gender inequality

Monday, November 16, 2020 - Midterm #2

Part 3: Democracy

10	11/16	17-18	Democracy, elections, voting
11	11/23	19-20	Taxation, attack on affirmative state, media
12	11/30	21-22	Militarism, unions
13	12/7	23-24	Democracy from below, possible futures

Wednesday, December 16, 2020 -- Final Exam, 7:25p-9:25 PM

Course Requirements, Grading, Other

Readings — With the exception of the Gettysburg Address (below), and occasional things I may post to Canvas or that your TA may assign, the only required reading for this is *American Society: How it Really Works 2nd Edition (AS)*. This book, written by Erik Olin Wright and me, is based on ideas and themes we developed in this course over several years of teaching it. *AS* is available for purchase at the University Book Store, 711 State Street, or at booksellers everywhere, or on Amazon. The Kindle version of it costs \$35.

Lectures & Sections — For any given week, you're expected to do the relevant chapters in *AS* and view all lecture and powerpoints assigned to it on Canvas *in advance* of that week's section meeting. You're also expected to come to section prepared to speak on (not just list) at least one thing from those materials that you did not fully understand, and/or some question prompted by them, and/or something that you disagree with on which you'd like more discussion. Your TA will require at least some (perhaps all) of these discussion-requests from you in writing.

NB: If you cannot meet any of these expectations, please let your TA know *in advance* of their expected performance and give a reason for why you're not doing them.

Exams — There are three exams in this class: two midterms and one final. Midterm 1 will cover the course content corresponding to lectures 1-5; Midterm 2 will cover the course content corresponding to lectures of 6-9; the Final will concentrate (about 60%) on the course content corresponding to lectures 10-13 but also include questions raised by other parts of the course. All the exams are multiple-choice. They are not designed to test for creativity, simply your mastery of material covered in lecture and section. Their dates, times, and locations are:

Midterm 1	Monday, October 19 (first half of scheduled class period)
Midterm 2	Monday, November 16 (first half of scheduled class period)
Final	Wednesday, December 16, 2020 (7:25– 9:25PM)

Excused Exam Absences and Make-Ups — You will not be excused from any exam or permitted a scheduled make-up unless you provide (a) in advance of the relevant exam, written notice of absence and a compelling justification of it and (b) after the relevant exam, documentation of the truth of this proffered justification.

Grading — Grades for the course will be based on performance on the exams and contribution to section. The midterm exams will each count for 20 percent of final grades; the final and section performance each for 30 percent. No honors credit is available for this course.

Accommodations — By Friday, September 25 (the end of the second week of class), please notify your TA if you are eligible for special arrangements or accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course. This may be the case if English is your second language or you experience a physical or psychological condition that makes it difficult for you to complete assignments and/or exams without some modification of those tasks. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the [McBurney Center](#). Their website has detailed instructions about how to apply to become a

McBurney Client: <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>. Provide a copy of your Faculty Notification Letter to both me and your TA by 9/25. We'll try to reserve rooms and proctors the week following, so should be able to tell you all details of your accommodations by then. Similarly, if you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for religious observances, send an email to me and your TA by September 25 stating the specific date(s) for which you request accommodation. Campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term, but not if you don't. For details, see: <https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=21698>

Academic honesty — As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University's rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity, as outlined. The standards are outlined by the [Office of the Dean of Students](http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/) at <http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/>

According to UWS (University of Wisconsin System) Chapter 14, academic misconduct is defined as:

- seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
- uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
- forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
- intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
- engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
- assists other students in any of these acts.

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the University's standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students [website](#). If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments or exams, please ask your instructor or one of the TAs.

Departmental notice of grievance and appeal rights — The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistants near the end of the semester. Students who have more immediate concerns about this course should report them to the instructor or the Department Chair, Christine Schwartz, socchair@ssc.wisc.edu, 608.262.1498.

Department learning objectives — Beyond the specific substantive and methodological content I will cover in this course, I have designed this course to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of Sociology:

Critical Thinking about Society and Social Processes: Sociology graduates can look beyond the surface of issues to discover the "why" and "how" of social order and structure and consider the underlying social mechanisms that may be creating a situation, identify evidence that may adjudicate between alternate explanations for phenomena, and develop proposed policies or action plans in light of theory and data.

See Things from a Global Perspective: Sociologists learn about different cultures, groups, and societies across both time and place. They are aware of the diversity of backgrounds and

experiences among residents of the United States. They understand the ways events and processes in one country are linked to those in other countries.

Prepare for Graduate School and the Job Market: Students use their social research skills to identify opportunities for employment or further study, assess their qualifications for these opportunities, and identify strategies for gaining the necessary knowledge and experience to improve their qualifications. Students are encouraged to develop and maintain portfolios of their written work and educational experiences to aid them in preparing applications.

COVID-19 Syllabus Statements

1. **UW-Madison [Badger Pledge](#)**

2. **UW-Madison [Face Covering Guidelines](#)**

While on campus all employees and students are required to wear [appropriate and properly fitting face coverings](#) while present in any campus building unless working alone in a laboratory or office space.

3. **Face Coverings During In-person Instruction Statement (COVID-19)**

Individuals are expected to wear a face covering while inside any university building. Face coverings must be [worn correctly](#) (i.e., covering both your mouth and nose) in the building if you are attending class in person. If any student is unable to wear a face-covering, an accommodation may be provided due to disability, medical condition, or other legitimate reason.

Students with disabilities or medical conditions who are unable to wear a face covering should contact the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) or their Access Consultant if they are already affiliated. Students requesting an accommodation unrelated to disability or medical condition, should contact the Dean of Students Office.

Students who choose not to wear a face covering may not attend in-person classes, unless they are approved for an accommodation or exemption. All other students not wearing a face covering will be asked to put one on or leave the classroom. Students who refuse to wear face coverings appropriately or adhere to other stated requirements will be reported to the [Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards](#) and will not be allowed to return to the classroom until they agree to comply with the face covering policy. An instructor may cancel or suspend a course in-person meeting if a person is in the classroom without an approved face covering in position over their nose and mouth and refuses to immediately comply.

4. **Quarantine or Isolation Due to COVID-19**

Students should continually monitor themselves for COVID-19 [symptoms](#) and [get tested for the virus](#) if they have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Students should reach out to instructors as soon as possible if they become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. Students are strongly encouraged to communicate with their instructor concerning their illness and the anticipated extent of their absence from the course (either in-person or remote). The instructor will work with the student to provide alternative ways to complete the course work.

Gettysburg Address

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln, November 19, 1863

Some Other Wise Words

Any fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius – and a lot of courage – to move in the opposite direction.... Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.... I wouldn't give a nickel for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I'd give my whole life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.

Albert Einstein

Enthusiastic partisans of the idea of progress are in danger of failing to recognize ... the immense riches accumulated by the human race on either side of the narrow furrow on which they keep their eyes fixed; by underrating the achievements of the past, they devalue all those which still remain to be accomplished. If men have always been concerned with only one task — how to create a society fit to live in — the forces which inspired our distant ancestors are also present in us. Nothing is settled; everything can still be altered. What was done, but turned out wrong, can be done again. The “Golden Age,” which blind superstition had placed behind (or ahead of) us, is in us.

Claude Lévi-Strauss

In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The “tide in the affairs of men” does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: “Too late.”

Martin Luther King Jr.