

Sociology 270: Social Theory

Units: 4.0

Spring 2020 | MWF | 2:00pm to 4:50pm

Location: Online

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Course Description

This is an undergraduate-level course in social theory. Rather than survey a breadth of authors and traditions, this course digs deep into the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Patricia Hill Collins. This will present us with multiple opportunities to discuss a range of important topics in sociology, including class, race, gender, state, culture, family, identity, and more.

To help keep us focused, we'll center most of our discussions on questions of *exploitation* and *oppression* in the United States. We will not, however, forget to position the U.S. within a complex field of global forces. We will also pay attention to our local conditions. We'll bring Marx and Engels, Du Bois, and Collins to Los Angeles by using their theories to make sense of some selected excerpts from three books: *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* by Kelly Lytle Hernández (2017), *L.A. Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement* by Ruth Milkman (2006), and *South Central Dreams: Finding Home and Building Community in South L.A.* by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Manuel Pastor (2021) (Figure 1).

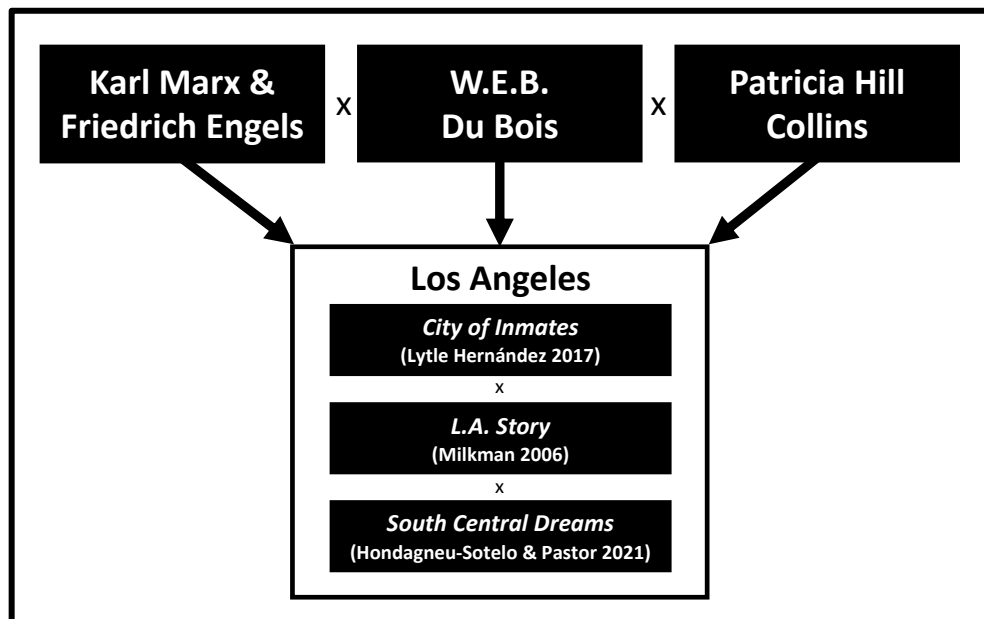


Figure 1. Sociology 270

This course adopts a “cartographical approach” to teaching and learning social theory. We will rely heavily on “theory maps,” which are visuospatial representations of dense written works. In simpler terms, you will use, critique, and make diagrams. Theory maps won’t replace the important tasks of reading, writing, or discussion, but they are essential tools in this class.

You should end this course with a significantly increased capability and confidence to “do theory.”

Learning Objectives

1. Understand our three theorists on their own terms and in relation to one another
2. Communicate analysis of course issues through writing, discussion, and “mapping”
3. Apply and critique the assigned texts

Course Materials

Readings

- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (Revised 10th Anniversary 2nd Edition)*. New York: Routledge. [10-digit ISBN: 0415924847].
- Du Bois, W.E.B. [1935] 1992. *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*. New York: The Free Press. [10-digit ISBN: 0684856573]
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader (2nd Edition)*. Edited by R. C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. [10-digit ISBN: 039309040X]
- All other readings are available on Blackboard.

Guides

- This syllabus includes short reading summaries for every regular reading assignment.
- Custom “theory maps” are also available on Blackboard.
- You should refer to these summaries and maps before, during, and after you read the assigned texts.

Student Evaluation

Grading Breakdown	
Reading Responses	10%
Mapping Inequality and Struggle at Amazon	20%
Mapping “No Lives Matter” and “Black Hoodie”	20%
Mapping Millennials and Social Change	20%
Final Project: Mapping Los Angeles	30%

Reading Responses

Each reading assignment comes with a set of questions. You are expected to submit an answer to *one* question from each set (due 12:00pm the day of the assigned reading). You may either write a response (three to four sentences with specific page citations) or “map” a response (diagram/table with specific page citations). Written responses must be submitted using the assignment text box and mapped responses must be attached as a standard image file (e.g., JPG). All reading responses are graded on a pass/fail basis. While wrong answers will not be penalized, I may ask you to resubmit a reading response if your initial submission is obviously careless. *Late reading responses will not be accepted, but you are allowed to skip two without penalty.*

Note: I may integrate your reading responses into my lecture slides. Please trust that I will never do this to mock you or highlight something you have done wrong.

Theory Mapping Assignments

You will develop your own theory maps to make sense of the following: 1) a set of articles detailing labor conditions and unionization struggles at Amazon, 2) a pair of songs and music videos by Body Count, and 3) an article on millennials and social change by USC sociologists. You’ll draw on Marx and Engels for the first assignment, Du Bois for the second, and Collins for the third. You must integrate ideas from both the primary readings and the material you’re applying them to. You must also write a 500-word summary (with specific page citations) for each map you produce. See the mapping assignment prompts in the syllabus schedule for additional details.

Final Project: Theory Mapping Los Angeles

For your final project, you will draw on the assigned excerpts from *City of Inmates*, *L.A. Story*, and *South Central Dreams* to stage, or rather “map,” three debates on Los Angeles: 1) Marx and Engels vs. Du Bois, 2) Marx and Engels vs. Collins, and 3) Du Bois vs. Collins. You must also write a 500-word summary (with specific page citations) for each of the three maps you produce. These must include citations from both the primary readings and the Los Angeles books. More instructions will be provided in lecture.

Additional policies and a list of important support services are detailed at the end of this syllabus.

Schedule

RR = reading response

TM = theory mapping assignment

Gray = important deadlines

Introduction			
Date	Topic	Reading	Deliverable
05/19	Syllabus	N/A	N/A
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels			
Date	Topic	Reading	Deliverable
05/21	Historical Materialism	Marx & Engels	RR by 12pm
05/24	Natural and Voluntary Divisions of Labor	Marx & Engels	RR by 12pm
05/26	Capitalism	Marx & Engels	RR by 12pm
05/28	Class Struggle	Marx & Engels	RR by 12pm
05/29	Mapping Inequality and Struggle at Amazon	See prompt	TM by 5pm
W.E.B. Du Bois			
Date	Topic	Reading	Deliverable
06/02	American Slavery and Global Capitalism	Du Bois	RR by 12pm
06/04	Rethinking Class Struggle	Du Bois	RR by 12pm
06/07	Racism and So-Called Free Labor	Du Bois	RR by 12pm
06/09	Seeing White Supremacy	Du Bois	RR by 12pm
06/10	Mapping “No Lives Matter” & “Black Hoodie”	Body Count	TM by 5pm
Patricia Hill Collins			
Date	Topic	Reading	Deliverable
06/11	Rethinking Oppression and Resistance	Collins	RR by 12pm
06/14	Black Women in Work, Fam., & Civ. Soc.	Collins	RR by 12pm
06/16	Controlling Images	Collins	RR by 12pm
06/18	Domains of Power & Politics of Empowerment	Collins	RR by 12pm
06/19	Mapping Millennials and Social Change	Council et al.	TM by 5pm
Theorizing Los Angeles			
Date	Topic	Reading	Deliverable
06/21	<i>City of Inmates</i>	See Blackboard	RR by 12pm
06/23	<i>L.A. Story</i>	See Blackboard	RR by 12pm
06/25	<i>South Central Dreams</i>	See Blackboard	RR by 12pm
06/28	Review	N/A	N/A
06/29	Final Project: Theory Mapping Los Angeles	See prompt	Final by 5pm

INTRODUCTION

WEDNESDAY, MAY 19th SYLLABUS

This is an unusual class. In addition to reviewing the syllabus, I'll do my best to answer some reasonable questions. What is social theory? Why does the official schedule of classes list this course as "sociological theory"? Is there a difference? Why are we reading Karl Marx (with Friedrich Engels), W.E.B. Du Bois, and Patricia Hill Collins? Where is Émile Durkheim and Max Weber? Aren't we supposed to read books by Pierre Bourdieu and Erving Goffman? What is the "cartographical approach" to teaching and learning social theory and why are we using it? What does it mean to "do theory"? Why are a couple of assignments due on Saturdays? I'm sure you also have plenty of other questions.

KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS

We start with Karl Marx (born 1818, Trier, Rhine province, Prussia – died 1883, London, England) and Friedrich Engels (born 1820, Barmen, Rhine province, Prussia – died 1895, London, England). We'll read excerpts from *The German Ideology* (1846), *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), and more. For your first theory mapping assignment, you will draw on Marx and Engels to examine inequality and struggle at Amazon. You will examine the following set of articles, which are all available on Blackboard: "Jeff Bezos: Your Legacy is Exploitation" by Paris Marx (2021), "The Life and Death of an Amazon Warehouse Temp" by Dave Jamieson (2015), and "Amazon After Bessemer" by Nantina Vgontzas (2021).

FRIDAY, MAY 21st HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

Marx. 1859. Preface from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. (pp. 3-6)¹
Marx and Engels. 1846. *The German Ideology*. (pp. 147-55)

At the root of all history is a simple fact for Marx and Engels: living people produce the means of their subsistence. However, people's mode of production varies across different stages in the division of labor (e.g., an ancient division of labor, a feudal division of labor, and a capitalist division of labor). According to Marx and Engels, these different stages are just different forms of ownership (i.e., the property relations that situate individuals in reference to the materials, instruments, and products of labor). And, with different forms of ownership come different class antagonisms: owners and slaves, lords and serfs, and bourgeoisie and proletariat. In each of these historical stages, the dominant class exploits the dominated class by appropriating the surplus of their labor. Except for communism (i.e., the end of class antagonisms), the relations of production will become "fetters" to the forces of production. This will always necessitate a social revolution that will transform the economic base and thus also consciousness and the superstructure.

¹ Page numbers are for *The Marx-Engels Reader* (1978), which includes all the assigned readings for Marx and Engels. The header for the first reading is "Marx on the History of His Opinions," but that is not what Marx titled the piece.

However, this will only occur if the old mode of production has exhausted its development and if the new forces of production have emerged within that expiring mode of production. Does this mean we are all just passive victims to the winds of material change? Maybe, but perhaps not totally. Marx and Engels say some interesting things about the relation between consciousness and revolution.

We'll watch a short video on historical materialism in class.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What does today's class antagonism look like in the United States?
2. How have you experienced or seen class exploitation?
3. What might a Marxist analysis of Los Angeles look like?

MONDAY, MAY 24th

NATURAL AND VOLUNTARY DIVISIONS OF LABOR

Marx and Engels. 1846. *The German Ideology*. (pp. 155-75, 189-93)

Engels. 1884. *The Origin of Family, Private Property, and State* (pp. 738-40)

Marx and Engels claim that life produces consciousness, and they insist that "life" generally translates into "social being." By producing the means of subsistence, people develop new needs and this necessitates more people (i.e., procreation) and therefore social relations. Such relations are organized by different divisions of labor, which can be further distinguished as either "natural" or "voluntary." The natural division of labor is always a forced division of labor. It exists as a power alien to individuals. This fact seems to emerge during the initial separation of mental and manual activity, but it really takes explicit form in the genesis of monogamy. The natural division of labor still exists today, but it will eventually be replaced by a voluntary division of labor. Under a voluntary division of labor, we won't be forced to specialize. Instead, we'll be able to realize our rich and varied talents and abilities across an array of productive tasks of our choosing. The voluntary division of labor, however, can only emerge once exploitation is abolished. This will happen when capitalism, the final class antagonism, disappears and we enter communism. Marx and Engels tell us relatively little about communism, but we know that within it there will be no exploitation, no natural/forced division of labor, and no private property. How will we get there? Through a global proletarian revolution.

We'll spend time in class briefly examining some popular accounts, and defenses, of the "free market," American "democracy," and more.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. How have you encountered a so-called natural division of labor?
2. What are the "ruling ideas" today?
3. What might Los Angeles look like without exploitation?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26TH
CAPITALISM

Marx. 1867. "Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist" (pp. 435-6)²

Marx. 1849. "Wage Labour and Capital." (pp. 203-17)

Engels. 1880. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. (pp. 700-17)

We turn to a short chapter linking industrial capitalism to colonialism, slavery, and other forms of so-called primitive accumulation before digging into Marx and Engels's analysis of capitalist production. They insist that wage labor presupposes capital and that capital presupposes wage labor. The proletariat must sell their labor power (i.e., their capacity to work) to the bourgeoisie in exchange for the means of subsistence. At the same time, the bourgeoisie must purchase labor power and appropriate workers' surplus in order to accumulate capital. The bourgeoisie must also intensify this exploitation if they hope to survive in a capitalist market. In other words, they have to undercut their competitors and the primary way they do this is by increasing the rate of surplus they appropriate from workers. This rate increases as the natural division of labor advances and as machinery is further integrated into production. More division of labor and more machinery simplify jobs, increase the reserve army of labor, and reduce workers to mere appendages of machines. This drives down wages (at least relative to the growth of capital), but it's also a recipe for disaster. A conflict at the economic base heats up as capitalism develops: the contradiction between socialized production and capitalist/individual appropriation. This contradiction between the forces and relations of production will increase class polarization, generate economic crises, and concentrate capital in the hands of superfluous capitalists. Meanwhile, class struggle intensifies and the proletariat begins to face an increasingly easy target: a smaller and smaller number of vulnerable capitalists.

In class, we'll draw on Marx and Engels to make sense of the so-called productivity-pay gap that has grown in the U.S. since the late 1970s.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What are some other ways that capitalists can intensify exploitation?
2. Why might Marx and Engels see today's billionaires as superfluous?
3. What are some other ways that colonialism could be linked to capitalism?

² Chapter XXXI from the first volume of Marx's *Capital* (1867).

FRIDAY, MAY 28th CLASS STRUGGLE

Marx. 1847. “The Coming Upheaval.” (pp. 218-9)³

Marx and Engels. 1848. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. (pp. 473-83)

Marx and Engels. 1846. *The German Ideology*. (pp. 197-200)

Marx. 1894. “On the Realm of Necessity and the Realm of Freedom.” (pp. 439-41)⁴

Marx and Engels. 1858/1882. “Europocentric World Revolution.” (pp. 676-7)⁵

How do we exit capitalism? According to Marx and Engels, the proletariat must shift from a class in itself to a class for itself. This transition happens as workers move from individual struggle (within workplaces), to collective struggle (across workplaces), and finally to political struggle (across nation/world). Ironically, the bourgeoisie furnish the conditions for the proletariat to become a class for itself. They continually immiserate wage labor and rip workers from tradition, religion, family, and so on. Thus, as capitalism advances, workers have less and less to lose. At the same time, the bourgeoisie advance the natural division of labor and this organizes workers like soldiers in the factory. The capitalists don’t realize it, but they’re playing with fire. They pour gasoline on this fire as they develop communication infrastructure. The bourgeoisie do this to spread capitalism across the globe, but they’re inadvertently making it easier for workers to communicate with one another. Capitalists also pull workers into the political arena in an effort to defeat old political enemies. As Marx and Engels put it, the bourgeoisie create their own gravediggers. What comes after the burial of capitalists? A shrinking realm of necessity and an expanding realm of freedom. Still, upon close reading, none of this actually seems very easy or automatic for Marx and Engels. Their notes on colonialism and the globalization of capital help illustrate this point.

We’ll watch one or two short videos on the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in class.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. How have you experienced or seen class struggle?
2. How might capitalists today be digging their own graves?
3. What might an expanded realm of freedom look like?

SATURDAY, MAY 29th MAPPING INEQUALITY AND STRUGGLE AT AMAZON

Produce a “theory map” that uses Marx and Engels’s concepts to understand inequality and struggle at Amazon. Use the following articles: “Jeff Bezos: Your Legacy is Exploitation” by Paris Marx (2021), “The Life and Death of an Amazon Warehouse Temp” by Dave Jamieson (2015), and “Amazon After Bessemer” by Nantina Vgontzas (2021). Your map can be hand-drawn and submitted as a photograph or produced on your computer. You must also submit a 500-word

³ Excerpt from Marx’s *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847).

⁴ Excerpt from the third volume of Marx’s *Capital*, which was published after Marx’s death (and edited by Engels).

⁵ Marx and Engels did not title this. This section includes two letters, one from Marx to Engels in 1858 and one from Engels to Karl Kautsky in 1882.

summary of your map and this must include specific page citations for Marx and Engels *and* the Amazon articles. This assignment is due by 5:00pm via Blackboard.

W.E.B. DU BOIS

Next, we turn to W.E.B. Du Bois (born 1868, Great Barrington, Massachusetts, U.S. – died 1963, Accra, Ghana). We'll read a number of his works, but we won't cover them in the order of their publication. Instead, we'll generally follow a historical chronology of some of his main empirical objects. For example, we'll read excerpts from *Black Reconstruction* (1935) before we read excerpts from *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) only because slavery and the Civil War happened before the data collected in Philadelphia. For your second theory mapping assignment, you will draw on Du Bois to examine two 2017 songs by Body Count: "No Lives Matter" and "Black Hoodie." The lyrics for both songs are posted on Blackboard, but you're encouraged to watch the music videos online.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2nd

AMERICAN SLAVERY AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM

Du Bois. 1935. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. (pp. 3-54) (Blackboard)

Du Bois's analysis of slavery in the antebellum South helps us better understand the significance of Black labor in the development of global capitalism. According to Du Bois, slavery helped solidify the color line and it paradoxically endured in a nation that celebrated equality and consent. Slavery's long history can be partially explained by its global economic significance in the nineteenth century. Capitalism in America and across Western Europe depended on this seemingly anomalous institution. Slavery simply and unsurprisingly drove down the cost of important commodities. After making the case that capitalists and workers across the industrializing world existed on a foundation of Black labor, Du Bois unpacks the internal dynamics of slavery in the American South. He starts at the bottom of the racial-labor hierarchy with Black workers. Du Bois is clear: the enslaved constituted the most exploited and degraded workers in America. Just above the color line, we find the largest population in the South: poor whites. This was mostly a population of economic outcasts, but a significant minority of poor whites found employment as slave overseers, slave drivers, slave dealers, and slave police. Lastly, Du Bois details the planter class, a small and exclusive group with immense concentrations of property and power. White workers certainly benefited from the color line, but not as much as the planters did. Their property and power clearly depended on a racial division of labor.

We'll examine a variety of artifacts in class, including a number of antebellum paintings and photographs, to better understand the setting Du Bois analyzes in the three assigned chapters.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What might Du Bois say to Marx and Engels about exploitation?
2. What might Du Bois say about celebrations of equality in the U.S. today?
3. How might capitalism still depend on a foundation of Black labor?

FRIDAY, JUNE 4th
RETHINKING CLASS STRUGGLE

Du Bois. 1935. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. (pp. 55-70, 121-6, 670-5, 694-708) (Blackboard)

Du Bois argues that the Civil War brought an end to slavery in the South through the general strike of Black labor. With increased opportunities to run away during the conflict, more and more enslaved people escaped plantations and ran to federal military camps for refuge. The Union eventually permitted these fugitives to labor in the camps before they finally let them fight in the war (along with “free” Black people from the North). Only after realizing they couldn’t win the war without Black warriors did the North seriously commit to abolition. Thus, it’s fair to say that Black labor ended slavery. However, this wasn’t total freedom. A post-slavery racial order quickly set and it looked remarkably like the one found under slavery: white planters were replaced by a white landholding/capitalist class and labor remained separated by the color line. In addition to receiving greater material rewards than Black labor (e.g., higher wages and better-funded schools), white labor enjoyed a “public and psychological wage” of being white. Black labor, on the other hand, tended to suffer an “inferiority complex.” White domination permeated all spheres of the postbellum South (e.g., economy, government, and culture) and new forces of racial oppression emerged (e.g., KKK, lynchings, and chain gangs). The new economic order emphasized both Black exploitation (white capitalists wanted to drive Black people into work) and Black exclusion (white labor wanted to drive Black people out of work).

In class, we’ll break out into to small groups and put Du Bois in conversation with Marx and Engels.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What might Du Bois say to Marx and Engels about class struggle?
2. How might white people today enjoy a public and psychological wage?
3. How might the dynamics of racist exploitation and exclusion operate today?

MONDAY, JUNE 7th
RACISM AND SO-CALLED FREE LABOR

Du Bois. 1899. *The Philadelphia Negro*. (pp. 97-8, 109-18, 126-41, 145-6, 343-7) (Blackboard)
 Du Bois. 1953. “Negroes and the Crisis of Capitalism in the United States.” (Blackboard)

Writing about Black people in Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century, Du Bois sketches a hierarchy that looks similar to the ones found in the pre- and post- Civil War South. America is structured by a stubborn racialized economic order that tends to put white exploiters at the top, Black labor at the bottom, and white labor in the middle. But why is this the case in industrial Philadelphia? Du Bois highlights three social forces that push Black wage labor down: 1) longstanding inequalities in education, training, and labor market experience, 2) fierce inter-racial competition (e.g., more privileged white workers and white unions organized against Black progress), and 3) the often-subtle discrimination of whites who hire and promote workers. These forces can be seen across a number of industries. Unsurprisingly, this hierarchy concentrates a lot

of suffering in Black neighborhoods. Meanwhile, white labor suffers less. This massive group in the middle is exploited, but they clearly enjoy more material and symbolic rewards than Black labor. Of course, white capitalists benefit tremendously from this arrangement. The color line drives wages down overall and it helps neutralize class struggle. Looking forward, Du Bois suggests the color line may “bend and loosen,” but it will not break anytime soon.

We’ll review some recent studies on racism and economic inequality in the contemporary United States and consider what Du Bois might say about the findings.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 9:00am via Blackboard)

1. What might Du Bois say to Marx and Engels about exploitation under capitalism?
2. How have you encountered the color line?
3. What does the racial division of labor look like in Los Angeles?

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9th **SEEING WHITE SUPREMACY**

Du Bois. 1923. “The Superior Race.” (Blackboard)

Du Bois. 1903. “Of Our Spiritual Strivings.” (Blackboard)

Du Bois. 1920. “The Souls of White Folk.” (Blackboard)

We close Du Bois with some essays that help clarify white supremacy. He begins with a critique of “White Imperial Industry,” a Frankenstein-like monster made possible by the oppression, exploitation, and exclusion of dark bodies. And here’s the ugly truth concealed by that monster: white people are not biologically, intellectually, or morally superior to people of color, but they enjoy real advantages at the expense of nonwhite people’s suffering. According to Du Bois, this truth is mystified by a sort of “religion” of white superiority. This ideology celebrates whiteness and problematizes Blackness. White people look down on Black people with pity and contempt. Their vision is obstructed by the color line, which acts like a great veil separating white and Black subjectivity. Du Bois tells us that people behind this veil harbor a double consciousness or a “twoness” of souls, thoughts, and strivings. While the veil is certainly a burden, it also comes with a gift of second-sight. People of color, and Black people in particular, can more easily see the truth of white supremacy. And this supremacy is a force to be reckoned with. White civilization was built, and continues to build itself, upon the exploitation of dark bodies across the world. In the end, the future is clear for Du Bois: the fight against white supremacy must be a global one.

We’ll watch a short video on Du Bois’s concept of “double consciousness” in class.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What might Du Bois say to Marx and Engels about consciousness?
2. What does the “religion” of white supremacy look like today?
3. What might the gift of second-sight reveal in Los Angeles?

THURSDAY, JUNE 10th
MAPPING “NO LIVES MATTER” AND “BLACK HOODIE”

Produce a “theory map” that uses Du Bois’s concepts to understand some of the key themes in Body Count’s “No Lives Matter” and “Black Hoodie.” The lyrics for both songs are posted on Blackboard, but you should also watch the music videos online. Your map can be hand-drawn and submitted as a photograph or produced on your computer. You must also submit a 500-word summary of your map and this must include specific page citations for Du Bois. Don’t worry about providing page citations for the songs. This assignment is due by 5:00pm via Blackboard.

PATRICIA HILL COLLINS

Our final theorist, before we turn our attention to Los Angeles, is Patricia Hill Collins (Distinguished University Professor of Sociology, Emerita at University of Maryland). We’ll read chapters and excerpts from *Black Feminist Thought* (2000).⁶ For your third theory mapping assignment, you will draw on Collins to examine a 2020 article authored by USC sociologists LaToya D. Council, Chelsea Johnson, Karina Santellano, and Hajar Yazdiha. The article is titled “Linking Contexts, Intersectionality, and Generations: Toward a Multidimensional Theory of Millennials and Social Change” and is available on Blackboard.

FRIDAY, JUNE 11th
RETHINKING OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

Collins. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought*. (pp. vi-ix, 4-17, 22-5, 41-3, 227-32)⁷

Marx and Engels helped us understand capitalism before Du Bois complicated this with an analysis of racism. Collins will complicate matters even more by challenging us to examine the intersections of capitalism, racism, and sexism. She argues there is a “universality of intersecting oppressions” but insists that they are not invariably organized across place or evenly lived between people. Collins nevertheless argues that particular locations and experiences can provide the most fruitful opportunities to study the intersections of oppression. This is at least partially why she centers her analysis on U.S. Black women. This population is neither uniform nor static, but their lived realities provide unique insights into a matrix of domination. Collins suggests that by studying the economic, political, and ideological dimensions of Black women’s oppression we can better understand the deep and otherwise invisible entanglements of capital, white power, and patriarchy in the U.S. and beyond. She also argues that the intersectional and multidimensional oppression of Black women undoubtedly shape their personal and collective knowledge. And much of this knowledge concerns strategies of resistance. Collins traces an enduring and adaptable tradition of Black feminist thought. This tradition is diverse, but it is rooted to some core themes

⁶ Page numbers correspond to the second edition of *Black Feminist Thought* (2000). The first edition was published in 1990, but Collins made a number of substantive changes to the version we’re reading. Later editions *may* work. See the footnotes for details on the specific sections assigned.

⁷ Preface to the First Edition, “The Suppression of Black Feminist Thought” (Chapter 1), “Why U.S. Black Feminist Thought?” (Chapter 2), “U.S. Black Feminism and Other Social Justice Projects” (Chapter 2), untitled introduction (Chapter 10), “Nation and Nationalism” (Chapter 10).

like the “oneness of all human life” and the “solidarity of humanity.” Thus, by studying the experiences of Black women we not only learn about multiple and interlocking systems of oppression but also the practical methods for opposing those systems.

We’ll watch a short video in class on intersectionality and consider how Collins might respond.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What might Collins say to Du Bois about the gift of second-sight?
2. What might Collins say to Marx and Engels about class consciousness?
3. What might the matrix of domination look like in Los Angeles?

MONDAY, JUNE 14th

BLACK WOMEN IN WORK, FAMILY, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Collins. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought*. (pp. 45-67)⁸

Collins examines the lived experiences of Black women across the interdependent and shifting contexts of work, family, and civil society.⁹ Under slavery, Black women recreated African notions of family and extended kin units as a means to resist their dehumanization, and this sparked the genesis of a Black civil society. During Jim Crow, Black women were so-called free wage laborers who were employed mostly as fieldworkers and domestic workers. During this time, the Black family extended communal childcare practices from the era of enslavement, and Black civil society strengthened its emphasis on racial solidarity. As masses of Black families migrated to Northern cities in the early twentieth century, some Black women began to labor in factories, but most were segregated into domestic work. Collins notes that cooperative networks among Black families continued during this time, but a gendered division began to form in Black civil society. The second half of the century then saw increased globalization, deindustrialization, and economic polarization, all of which intensified the precarity of Black working-class families. However, thanks to struggles within Black civil society, this period was also marked by substantial gains in political rights for Black Americans. These economic and political circumstances then intensified a vertical division between Black women. Some entered a new but vulnerable Black middle class as professionals and managers, but many sank into the “working poor.” This separation fueled a rise in single motherhood, thinned communal childcare, and sparked class divisions in Black civil society.

We’ll break out into small groups in class and put Collins’s historical analysis of work, family, and civil society in conversation with Du Bois and Marx and Engels.

⁸ Chapter 3.

⁹ In the glossary of *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins writes that “Black civil society” is synonymous with “Black community” and “the Black public sphere.” She defines this as “a set of institutions, communication networks, and practices that help African-Americans respond to social, economic, and political challenges confronting them” (Collins 2000: 298).

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What might Collins say to Du Bois about the gift of second-sight?
2. What might Collins say to Marx and Engels about industrial capitalism?
3. How might Black civil society and collective resistance look different today?

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16th **CONTROLLING IMAGES**

Collins. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought*. (pp. 69-96, 99-102)¹⁰

Recall that for Collins oppression is not only intersectional but also multidimensional. Whether you're talking about racism, capitalism, sexism, or their many linkages, oppression involves a mixture of economic, political, and ideological dimensions. Collins's analysis of work, family, and civil society help us understand the economic and political dimensions of Black women's oppression and resistance. Her writings on "controlling images" help us understand the ideological dimensions of those same processes. For her, controlling images are essentially stereotypes that make injustice appear natural, normal, or inevitable. These are largely produced and reproduced by schools, media, government agencies, popular music, and other sites for making and remaking ideology, and they are primarily manipulated by the elite groups within these sites (namely "elite white male power"). Collins details a number of controlling images imposed on Black women across time: "mammies," "matriarchs," "welfare queens," "Black ladies," "jezebels," and more. Each of these images, even if some of their features appear to be "positive," function to objectify the Black woman as the Other. Objectification aims to convert them into things to manipulate and control and seeks to impose a reality defined from above. The process of othering seeks to deny Black women their humanity and situate them as strangers. Of course, Black women resist controlling images in meaningful ways. Collins argues that much of Black feminist thought is oriented toward a project of self-definition against various controlling images.

In class, we'll watch a short video in which Collins herself details the significance of controlling images.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What might Collins say to Du Bois about the "inferiority complex"?
2. What might Collins say to Marx and Engels about "ruling ideas"?
3. What are some other examples of controlling images?

FRIDAY, JUNE 18th **DOMAINS OF POWER AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT**

Collins. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought*. (pp. 273-90)¹¹

Collins argues that any matrix of domination is ordered by the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power. While she is clear that these four domains are interrelated, she is also clear that each have unique functions. The structural domain of power, which largely

¹⁰ Chapter 4 and "Finding a Voice: Coming to Terms with Contradictions" (Chapter 5).

¹¹ Chapter 12.

includes the economy, state, media, and more, does a lot to organize the conditions of oppression in macro terms. The disciplinary domain of power, which includes bureaucratic hierarchies and techniques of surveillance, helps manage oppression within and across institutions. The hegemonic domain of power, which includes practices for generating and disseminating dominant ideological and “commonsensical” ideas about social inequality, functions to justify oppression. Finally, the interpersonal domain of power, which simply captures micro interactions across a number of terrains, shapes the everyday lived experiences of oppression. Again, these domains are interrelated. They seem to always exist in any given context. For example, you can easily identify all four in schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and more. Collins’s account of different domains of power compliments and clarifies her opening claim that oppression is both intersectional and multidimensional. In light of her argument that oppression generally motivates resistance, this suggests that Black feminist activism must target these various intersections, dimensions, and domains. In short, because Black women’s oppression is so complex, Collins suggests that they must develop and fight for an equally complex notion of empowerment.

We’ll break into small groups in class and consider how each domain of power might help us understand Los Angeles. This will also give us a chance to think about the politics of empowerment.

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What does the structural domain of power look like in Los Angeles?
2. What does the disciplinary domain of power look like in Los Angeles?
3. What does hegemonic domain of power look like in Los Angeles?

SATURDAY, JUNE 19th

MAPPING MILLENNIALS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Produce a “theory map” that uses Collins’s concepts to understand millennials and social change. Use “Linking Contexts, Intersectionality, and Generations: Toward a Multidimensional Theory of Millennials and Social Change” by LaToya D. Council, Chelsea Johnson, Karina Santellano, and Hajar Yazdiha’s (2020). Your map can be hand-drawn and submitted as a photograph or produced on your computer. You must also submit a 500-word summary of your map and this must include specific page citations for Collins *and* Council et al. This assignment is due by 5:00pm via Blackboard.

THEORIZING LOS ANGELES

Let’s bring Marx and Engels, Du Bois, and Collins to Los Angeles! We’ll use their theories to make sense of some selected excerpts from three books: *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Lytle Hernández 2017), *L.A. Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement* (Milkman 2006), and *South Central Dreams: Finding Home and Building Community in South L.A.* (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Pastor 2021). Note that there are no reading summaries or instructor-produced theory maps for these texts. These are the materials that you will use to “map” some debates between our three

theorists. As such, our remaining class meetings will function as workshops to develop your final project.

MONDAY, JUNE 21st
CITY OF INMATES

Lytle Hernández. 2017. *City of Inmates*. (pp. 1-15, 45-8, 57-63, 65-9, 124-5, 132-7, 146-50, 159-66, 188-9, 193-4) (Blackboard)

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What might Marx and Engels say about the excerpts from *City of Inmates*?
2. What might Du Bois say about the excerpts from *City of Inmates*?
3. What might Collins say about the excerpts from *City of Inmates*?

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23rd
L.A. STORY

Milkman. 2006. *L.A. Story*. (pp. xiii, 1-16, 33-40, 59-61, 77-82, 104-13, 133-40) (Blackboard)

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What might Marx and Engels say about the excerpts from *L.A. Story*?
2. What might Du Bois say about the excerpts from *L.A. Story*?
3. What might Collins say about the excerpts from *L.A. Story*?

FRIDAY, JUNE 25th
SOUTH CENTRAL DREAMS

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Pastor. 2021. *South Central Dreams*. (pp. 1-10, 39-51, 72-6, 155-7, 160-3, 172-6, 190-2, 200-5, 221-9, 240-2) (Blackboard)

Reading Response (select one and submit by 12:00pm via Blackboard)

1. What might Marx and Engels say about the excerpts from *South Central Dreams*?
2. What might Du Bois say about the excerpts from *South Central Dreams*?
3. What might Collins say about the excerpts from *South Central Dreams*?

MONDAY, JUNE 29th
REVIEW

No readings. This is an optional review session for the final project.

TUESDAY, JUNE 29th
FINAL PROJECT: THEORY MAPPING LOS ANGELES

Draw on the assigned excerpts from *City of Inmates*, *L.A. Story*, and *South Central Dreams* to stage, or rather “map,” three debates on Los Angeles: 1) Marx and Engels vs. Du Bois, 2) Marx and Engels vs. Collins, and 3) Du Bois vs. Collins. You must also write a 500-word summary (with

specific page citations) for each of the three maps you produce. These must include citations from both the primary readings and the Los Angeles books. More instructions will be provided in lecture. This assignment is due by 5:00pm via Blackboard.

Additional Policies

Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend every class. However, simply showing up will not be enough to succeed. You must also be engaged. Among other things, this means *you must bring a printed or digital copy of the assigned reading to class.*

Plagiarism

Presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Independent Work

This is an extension of the plagiarism policy. You must complete all assignments and exams independently. That said, you are encouraged to discuss course material with your peers outside of class.

List of Support Systems

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety

UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu