

# **BYU Honors 395: Radical Theory & Social Change**

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This is an honors seminar for bright undergraduates at BYU, as well as a few grad students seeking a new educational experience. When we explore "radical" theories, we will do so using a dictionary definition of the word for starters. "Radical" means getting to the root or origin. Another term would be "fundamental" or "core." It also suggests concepts like thoroughgoing or extreme, especially with regard to changes from accepted or traditional systems. In the larger society, it has to do with favoring drastic political, economic, social and environmental reforms to build a better society.

Among key issues in our class on radicalism are what the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. called the three major evils facing this country: "The evil of racism, the evil of poverty, and the evil of war."

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These and more concepts this semester consist of the following themes:

***Environmentalism*** and social ecology with respect to nature, wildlands, global warming and climate change, preserving wilderness, etc.

***Feminism*** which focuses on the need to combat how women are treated, reducing sexism, exploitation of females with respect to jobs, salaries and employment, in religion, career opportunities, higher education, and the larger U.S. culture.

***Corporatism*** in which this course will try coming to grips with the dominant power of capitalism and huge, greedy institutions over the middle class and America's poor.

***Trade Unions'*** decline as a consequence of Corporatism wherein workers are exploited, paid low wages, face industrial dangers on the job, as well as being reduced to automatons on the factory floor, unable to use their God-given brains to be creative and productive while top executives reign.

***Racism***, the tragic condition of African Americans, Latinos, Asians, global immigrants, Native Americans, and other marginalized groups who face much hate while struggling to raise their children, make ends meet, secure their kids' education, obtain decent jobs with meaningful futures, etc.

**Militarism**, which has been the scourge of human history as powerful elites send their young to fight and dies on battlefields around the globe, oppressing people of other nations in order to grab more land, oil, minerals and agricultural produce to enhance the quality of life for the wealthy class in big U.S. cities.

**Poverty**, the terrible scourge of America and a sin on our history. More importantly, it's an ugly symbol of what's wrong with a supposedly large, successful, freedom-loving country nation wherein the "poorest of the poor" attempt to eke out a miserable existence by facing the travails of food insecurity, bad housing in run down neighborhoods, meaningless family life, a lack of decent public transportation, inadequate healthcare, few educational opportunities for parents or kids, discrimination, and little social connectedness.

**Cultural deficits** in which millions of Americans have little, if any, opportunities to experience the beauty of fine arts, including oil and watercolor paintings, the music of Bach and Mozart from choral and orchestral concerts, meaningful poetry, onstage dramas from the greats like Shakespeare, the marvels of dance through ballet and other forms, and so much more, down to the local community college's performances.

**Political** incompetence and/or extremism in which many people are beneficiaries of either U.S. passive disinterest in democracy, or right-wing citizens who hate immigrants, minorities, educated people, etc. Too many people in our society ignore the right to vote, don't read or want to learn what may be occurring at the level of one's community, region, and state, or even at the level of national government.

### **Class Learning Process:**

We will meet from 1:00-4:00 PM each Friday in the Kennedy Center seminar room for a three hour block. This course assumes that participating students are bright, budding scholars who are internally driven. Thus, the way we will operate is as equal peers (both for the professor and attendees) in dialogue together. There won't be formal lectures, but instead, through a seminar format, we will all be responsible for having read the day's material ahead of time and being prepared to contribute one's own thinking, analysis, and critiques. "Engaged scholarship" is my motif for this course. I will seek to engage in healthy dialogue each week where questioning, confrontation, and debate is not only allowed, but the norm. Passive students, those who prefer to sit back and merely listen in their classes, would be better served by

another course where simply scanning an article and regurgitating it on a test, is more typical:)

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### **Course Readings:**

Honors 340 offers a series of books on radical social analysis that we will not simply read, but fully digest through the coming days, reading roughly one book per week. Specific readings for a particular class session will be proposed through the organic development of our collective critical analyses as a group while theories and advocacy guide our thinking. Over the semester's 14 weeks. The assigned books are among the favorites that have inspired, as well as confronted, this professor's life as an advocate of the down trodden, a simple believer in Christ, and a pilgrim among the global poor. This semester, each little volume that is to be deeply studied in framing issues includes the following titles (plus a brief intro to the author):

*Rules for Radicals* by Saul Alinsky, the "Bible" of community organizing and mobilizing for revolutionary justice in the U.S. As a radical, impoverished Chicago Jew he learned about power and oppression early. Seeing waves of immigrants suffer, he earned a PhD at the University of Chicago so he could solve community problems. In the worst slums and ghettos, he organized the Neighborhood Council, "Back of the Yards," to help the poor gain power.

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire, the third most cited book in the social sciences. This radical Brazilian priest grew up in the Nordeste in hunger and abject poverty. Developing an educational praxis that influenced not only schooling, but also liberation theology, he sought to help peasants overcome illiteracy. For helping them learn to read, he was arrested and then exiled by the military junta for two decades (teaching at Harvard, etc.). Freire used critical education to try and free the oppression of the rural poor in Brazil, Chile, and beyond.

*The Making of a Counter Culture* by Theodore Roszak, celebrated author of books who coined the term "counterculture," Princeton PhD and Stanford professor, saw himself as a modern Luddite, and was a Guggenheim Fellow.

*To Have or to Be?* by Erich Fromm, the famous German social psychologist, psychoanalyst, sociologist, humanistic philosopher, and democratic socialist.

A German Jew who fled the Nazi regime, he spent his life advocating for the oppressed.

*Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* by E. F. Schumacher, UK scholar/philosopher/engineer on humane ecosystems, economics, and appropriate technology.

*American Power and the New Mandarins* by Noam Chomsky American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, historian, social critic, political activist, "the father of modern linguistics" at MIT, author 150 influential books, especially in the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements.

*The Monkey Wrench Gang*, a novel by Edward Abbey, essayist, anarchist, author of iconic works of early environmentalism who lived in the red rock of Southern Utah writing and criticizing state and federal public land policies.

*Truth is God* by Mohandas Gandhi, Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist, and political ethicist who founded the strategy nonviolent resistance in leading the successful campaign for India's independence from Britain. His methods became adopted by oppressed groups globally.

*The Ascent of Man* by Jacob Bronowski, Polish-British historian who developed a humanistic approach to science and did a 1973 BBC television documentary series as "one of the world's most celebrated intellectuals."

*The Wretched of the Earth* by Franz Fanon of Martinique, West Indies who as a Marxist humanist is concerned with the psychopathology of colonization.

*The True Believer*, one of ten books by Eric Hoffer, the blind San Francisco Longshoreman Union dock worker, who became a widely acclaimed American moral and social philosopher.

*Understanding Media* by Marshall McLuhan, Canadian philosopher at the University of Toronto, whose work is a cornerstone of media theory. He coined new phrases like "the medium is the message," "global village," and "hot & cool media," predicting the Internet 30 years before it existed.

*Tools for Conviviality* and/or the book, *Deschooling Society*, both by Ivan Illich, Austrian Jew who escaped the Nazis, and became a Catholic priest, theologian, and philosopher. He was religious and social critic of modern society's institutional approach who founded a radical institute, el Centro Intercultural de Documentación (CIDOC) during decades of living in Cuernavaca Mexico.

*Letter from Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King, Jr. on racism, civil rights, and the need for more noble values in American culture. Leading the 1960s struggle for racial justice and earning the Nobel Peace Prize, Rev. King has become a U.S. hero ever since being assassinated for empowering Black sanitation workers on strike for decent wages in Tennessee.

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In this Honors course, are we going to become radicals by the end of this semester? It's up to each participant as to what is learned, accepted, rejected, etc. My hope is for ever-expanding minds and a willingness to consider radicalness in the true sense of not only the authors we'll read, but the rugged radicalism of Jesus Christ and Joseph Smith who both took on the oppressive structures of their day and advocated for love, truth, and greater justice.

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"I love that man better who swears a stream as long as my arm yet deals justice to his neighbors and mercifully deals his substance to the poor, than the long, smooth-faced hypocrite." - The Prophet Joseph Smith