"With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion."—Jacques Attali

Course Overview:

This course asks you to imagine social deviance as noise—a cacophony of subversions disrupting the harmony of a given social order. Social control is the opposite. It works to silence the resistive sounds of deviance and to transform the noisy challenge of difference into the music of conformity. Social control is what gives a social order its power. When effective, social control ritually reduces, expels, or constrains what is "other" to the dominant organization of power within a specific historical period.

In imagining the battle between deviance and social control as a contest between those with sufficient power to produce and enforce some versions of social reality to the exclusion of "others," this course invites you to engage with a story at the core of sociology itself. How do societies construct boundaries between what is normatively acceptable and that which is condemned as deviant? When and how are social boundaries resisted and changed? What are the material and imaginary effects of enacting boundaries in certain ways but not others? How is the division between what is perceived as normative and what is viewed as deviant related to the repeated production and/or deconstruction of various forms of social hierarchy? How, in other words, is the battle between deviance and social control shaped by power-charged practices of gender, sexuality, race, and global economic position? To explore such questions is to pay attention to how some forms of behaving, thinking, and feeling are made to appear as if naturally good, while others are labeled evil, sleazy, dirty, dangerous, sick, immoral, crazy, or just plain "deviant." This is a core analytic concern of this course.

In analyzing the relationship between deviance and social control, this course is particularly concerned with the rise and fall of different ways of thinking about and acting to control threatening forms of nonconformity. Theoretical perspectives of this sort guide how we imagine and react toward deviance. Indeed, throughout history a wide array of religious authorities, legal experts, philosophers, politicians, police, therapists, activists, and social scientists have constructed competing theoretical stories about what causes deviance and how nonconformity might best be controlled. In order to understand the meaning and social impact of such perspectives, students enrolled in this course are expected to critically explore
the conceptual imagery, methodological strategies, and social control practices of nine theoretical perspectives which have captured the social imagination of northwestern societies at various points in history. These perspectives have often been used by those at the helm of northwestern forms of power as ritual defenses against and/or tools for the global subordination of those they label as "others." Sometimes these perspectives have sparked social change.

All theoretical stories or perspectives on deviance are told from power-charged social standpoints. These standpoints frame the ways that social actors view deviance at different places and times in history. The theoretical perspectives examined in this course are no exception. As such, in studying how perspectives on deviance are historically constructed and put to use, students will be asked to consider how their own biographical situations on history influence how they make sense of and respond to deviance. This is a key aspect of a "power-reflexive" approach to social boundaries. As a method of social research, a "power-reflexive" approach demands that as students of deviance and social control we attempt to discern how our own interpretive pathways are both facilitated and limited by the relations of power in which we ourselves are situated. In approaching deviance from a "power-reflexive" viewpoint, this course explores how influential ideas about nonconformity and what to do about it arise and fall. It is also intended to provide a scholarly foundation for an ethically informed viewpoint on battles between deviance and social control and the implications of such battles for the realization of social justice.

Course Outline/Assigned Readings

**Topic One:** *Control and Resistance: the theory and practice of deviance.*

This section introduces students to key aspects of sociological theory and methods, providing the conceptual foundations for analytic approaches used throughout the course. Deviance and social control are here conceived as ritual social practices, material and imaginary "dramatizations" of ever-changing natural historical relationships between knowledge and power.

*Readings:*
3. Readings on the learning and labeling of deviance. *See Topic Five below***

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Topic Two: **Supernatural Controls and Sacred Transgressions.**

This section examines the rise of Judaic-Christian perspectives on deviance as "sin" and the implications of this distinctive religious viewpoint for a sociological understanding of culture, sexuality, gender, and spirituality.

**Readings:**

**Video:** *The Burning Years.*

Topic Three: **Social Control in the Age of Reason: "the (white) Rights of Man".**

This section examines the sociological development of eighteenth century legal theories of deviance as "rational hedonism" and nineteenth century notions of nonconformity as sickness. In critically examining these perspectives, each is compared with sado-dispassionate worldviews that arise at essentially the same time in history. Is it possible that a cultural disposition toward sadism operates as an unacknowledged shadow of both classical rationality and the positivist methods of a medicalized approach to deviance? What are the implications of such a sado-dispassionate shadow for the ritual organization of sex/gender, racial and economic institutions?

**A. Cool Man Calculating: the classical perspective.**

**Readings:**

**Video:** *The Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti.*
B. **Deviance as Sickness: medical positivism and control of the flesh.**

*Readings:*
   (Originally published in *The Wilson Quarterly*)

**Videos:** *Madness and Medicine*; and Stephen Pföhl and Avery Gordon, *Criminological Displacements*.

**Topic Four:** **Sociological Surveillance: pleasure of the scientific gaze.**

This section provides a critical introduction to the concepts, methods, and the historical context of perspectives dominating the sociological imagination of deviance from the years following World War I until the 1950s. Particular attention will be paid to economic, gendered, and multicultural dimensions of both deviance and social control.

A. **The Disorganization Perspective: Rapid Social Change and Normative Breakdown**

*Readings:*

B. **Functionalism and Cybernetics: Deviance as Adjustive Feedback.**


**Video:** *The Hunting Ground*.

C. **Lost in Desire: the Anomie Perspective**


**Topic Five:** **Learning and Labeling Deviance**

This section provides an overview of two perspectives focusing on the role of social interaction in shaping the development and control of deviance. Both perspectives were particularly influential in the 1960s and 1970s. (*The
readings from *Images of Deviance and Social Control* for this section are relevant to the "historical autobiographies" assignment and should be read during the first month of this course.)

A. **Becoming an Outsider: the learning perspective**
   Readings:

B. **Questioning Social Control: the problem of societal reaction**
   Readings:

**Topic Six: Power-Reflexive Reconfigurations of Deviance and Social Control**

This section concludes the course with a discussion of a variety of convergence critical viewpoints. Of particular concern are the contributions of pluralistic conflict, feminism, Marxism, anarchism, anti-racist, and poststructuralist critiques of hierarchical orderings of power and knowledge.

**Readings:**

**Course Requirements:**

This is a core course in sociology. It is also cross-listed as a course in Women’s Studies, Psychoanalytic Studies, and American Studies. Its aim is to introduce students to the sociological study of the theories, methods, and policy implications of various approaches to the social control of deviance. Toward this end, the course has three major individual writing projects—two essay exams and a "historical autobiography." A fourth assignment—the group ethnographic project—also includes a writing component. A detailed explanation of each of the following assignments will be provided during the course of the semester.

1. "Sociological Autobiography" of involvement in deviance and/or social control: 5-6 double-spaced page essay (20% course grade), due in class, Tuesday, February 21st. Please note: In additions to concerns discussed in the first month of the course, students are asked to make use of ideas from in Chapter 8, “The Learning Perspective” and Chapter 9, “The Societal Reaction
“Perspective” of *Images of Deviance and Social Control: a Sociological History.*

2. First Take-Home Essay Examination, due in class on Tuesday, March 28th. (30% course grade). Examination will be distributed in class on Tuesday, March 14th.

3. Final Take-Home Essay Examination (30% course grade), due no later than Thursday, May 11th, 12:00 PM. Examination will be distributed in class on the final day of the course, May, May 4th.

4. Group Ethnographic Project: team field research, description, and theoretical analysis of a particular scene of deviance and/or social control. Final group projects involve both a short written component and mixed-media presentations to several other small research groups. Research groups will be organized according to students’ interests and each group will meet with the Teaching Assistant two times over the course of the semester to prepare for their ethnographic research and project presentation (20% course grade).

5. The class will periodically break into small groups to discuss assigned readings and course themes. All students are expected to actively prepare for and participate in these discussions.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic Integrity is of utmost importance to this and all Boston College courses and research. The university’s academic integrity procedures will be rigorously enforced. For a full description of Boston College’s academic integrity policy, see [WWW.bc.edu/offices/stsrv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity](http://WWW.bc.edu/offices/stsrv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity)