

# Organizing Culture Change, Autumn, 2021

HIST 387/ PSYC 461/ MGMT 491-002/ CONF 399/ SOC 395

Class time: Monday(s) at 1:30

Innovation 222

(Fully face to face)

Instructor of record: Peter N. Stearns

**E-mail:** [pstearns@gmu.edu](mailto:pstearns@gmu.edu) (feel free to email)

**Office Hours:** Mondays 10:30-12 (by appointment only), Tuesdays 12-1:15.East 207A; other times can be arranged for inperson or Zoom.

## Main purpose of course

Culture change, or significant shifts in basic beliefs and values, is an important phenomenon, both in the past and today; but it is not always easy to understand and explain. It's much harder to pin down, for example, than policy change. This course uses a case study method to provide greater experience in evaluating culture change.. As we watch possible culture changes in our own society (and resistance to change), for example in racial attitudes, greater familiarity with patterns of this sort has obvious contemporary relevance.

Culture change constitutes an important and complex phenomenon, both in human societies and in organizations. This course assesses several types of culture change, both American and international, in an interdisciplinary context, drawing from psychology, sociology, business, conflict analysis, and history. Case studies will range from religious conversions to corporate settings to conflict management, toward finding common patterns and best practices both in analyzing and in implementing culture change. Students, drawn from several relevant majors, will develop research topics and participate in various discussions to explore additional themes in the field.

**Readings and class sessions:** Stearns, Peter N. (with Olivia O'Neill and Jack Censer) *Cultural Change in Modern World History : Cases, Causes and Consequences* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019). Available for purchase.

Various articles assigned per session and all are available on Blackboard

## Requirements and grading

**The main components of the grade are as follows: 25% class participation; 15% three shorter essays; 35% research paper; 25% take-home final.**

Class participation 25%. One weekly comment paper on a question provided each Friday, due following Thursday by 5. 250-500 words. Students who turn in at least 10 satisfactory comments, of the 14 possible, will receive an A for this segment. But fairly regular participation is required for this grade. Additional credit may be given for participation in weekly Discussion Board exchanges or other direct exchanges with Prof. Stearns, or for activity in class. *Where possible, please complete assigned reading for the week before class.*

Brief papers: 5%. One paper due in session 3, on the causes for the decline of magic; one paper due Session 9, on “lessons” from gay rights movement. Papers 300-500 words or so.

Exploratory paper: 10% due Session 4: each student will explore one culture change issue with selective research. 1000 words. Assignment will be explained in Week 1. See Appendix for list of topics.

Research paper: 35%. Due in early December. 5000 words or so, with prospectus presented in advance and topic to be approved by instructor. Topic statements due Oct 1. A later class will involve topic presentations. Topics will involve exploration of a particular example of culture change of interest to you (U.S., international, or comparative).

Take home final: 25%. Due one week after end of classes.

***Important:***

Please consult the Blackboard course site **before** every class. The Blackboard site has discussion questions and, often, article or excerpt readings. Click on “Course Content” on the left menu bar to find the relevant course materials. There will also be a Discussion Board exchange every week except for the final week. Weekly participation questions will also be emailed to each student.

**Academic Honesty and Collaboration:**

The integrity of the University Community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple practices to follow at all times are that: 1) all work submitted be your own; 2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and 3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification.

**Mon, Aug 23 | Session 1: Introducing culture and culture change; what is culture? Culture as cause and effect.**

- What is culture and why is it important?
- What is culture change? Why is it complicated? Has culture change accelerated in modern times?
- What are some of the most important cultural changes in the US over the past 50 years?
- Identify a current “culture issue” in a society, or an organization or at GMU where you would like to see change? How does one go about effecting culture change?
- What are some leading culture changes going on in the world today?

Reading: Peter Stearns *Culture change*, ch 1.

Chapter 2, “Culture Context” from Larry Naylor, *Culture and change*, 1996, pp14-36. On Blackboard.

Discussion question for the group: What is “cancel culture” and how does it relate to culture change?

**Mon, Aug. 30 | Session 2: What are some leading culture change topics? How to analyze culture change**

- Markus, Hazel Rose, and Shinobu Kitayama. “Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation.” *Psychological review* 98, no. 2 (April 1, 1991): 224–253
- Stearns, *Culture Change*, ch 2.
- Bourke, Joanna. “Premature Burials and the mysteries of death.” in *Routledge History of Death Since 1800*, edited by Peter N. Stearns. (Routledge 2020, pg. 353).
- Baseline, Vyta, Dante Burrichter, and Peter N Stearns. “Debating the Birthday: Innovation and Resistance in Celebrating Children.” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 12, no. 2 (2019): 262–284.

Assignment: in advance of class, send in at least one major contemporary culture change issue (US or elsewhere). We will discuss these in class.

Further discussion question: what kinds of culture change issues are involved in dealing with contemporary racism?

**\*\*\*\*\*No Class Labor Day, Monday, September 6<sup>th</sup>\*\*\*\*\***

**Mon, Sept 13<sup>th</sup> / Session 3: Big Culture Change: religion, enlightenment, the state**

- Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), Ch. 18.
- Peter Stearns, *Culture Change*, Ch. 3.

Assignment: 1-2 page paper on causes of decline of magic in European culture. Due by beginning of class, hard-copy or by email.

Discussion questions: why and how was the Enlightenment such a major change in Western culture? Are there “big” culture changes issues developing in the world today?

### **Mon, Sept 20 | Session 4: Culture Change, Revolution and Protest**

- F. Chazel, “Sociology of Social Movements,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), 14371-14375.
- Peter Stearns, *Culture Change*, Ch. 4.

Discussion questions: What is the role of culture in revolution? Are revolutionary cultures available today, now that Marxism has declined? What kind of cultural framework is involved in current “populist” protests?

Exploratory paper due (this assignment will be explained separately)

### **Mon, Sept 27 | Session 5: Organizations and Culture Change**

- Chapter 3, Joanne Martin, “Pieces of the puzzle: What is culture? What is not culture?” In *Organizational Culture: Mapping the terrain* (Sage, 2002), 55-92. Available on Blackboard.
- John Kotter, “Leading Change: Why transformation efforts fail” *Harvard Business Review*, 85 no. 1 (2007): 96-103. Available on Blackboard.
- Peter Stearns, *Culture Change*, Ch. 5.
- R.A. Weber & C.F. Camerer, “Cultural conflict and merger failure: An experimental approach,” *Management Science*, 49 (2003): 400–415. Available on Blackboard.

-Valcore, Jace. “Police Culture Now, But not Forever” *New Leaders Council*, May 17, 2018.

Available here through this link: <https://medium.com/the-new-leader/police-culture-now-but-not-forever-10e4e0f903fc>

Discussion question: How does organizational culture change differ from more general types of culture change? (Think of at least one example of organizational culture change in addition to those discussed in the readings)

- Due: brief prospectus on research paper. The prospectus, at least 250 words, should define the topic and show its relevance to an understanding of culture change. The topic can be a current culture change issue, or more strictly historical; American or international.

### **Mon, Oct 4 | Session 6: Culture Change and Health and Death: cultural construction**

- Peter Stearns, *Culture Change*, Ch. 6.
- Jacobson, Michael. “The Transformation of death discourse: from ‘taboo’ to ‘revival’ at the threshold of the new millennium” in *Routledge History of Death Since 1800*, edited by Peter N. Stearns (Routledge 2020, pg. 152).
- Jansson, Åsa. “Normal and Pathological Sadness in the Age of Depression” in the *Routledge Modern History of Emotions*, edited by Peter N. Stearns and Katie Barclay (Routledge 2021, Chapter X). (available on blackboard)

Discussion questions: Is modern culture handling death fairly well, or is this a big challenge? What is the medicalization of culture about, and is it a good thing?

**Tues, Oct, 12 | Session 7: Emotions and Culture Change NOTE DIFFERENT DAY**

- Peter Stearns, *Culture Change*, Ch.7.
- Stearns, Peter N. "Shame, and a Challenge for Emotions History." *Emotion Review* 8, no. 3 (July 2016): 197–206. (Available on blackboard)

Discussion questions: Are major changes in emotional culture occurring in the 21<sup>st</sup> century US? What is "informalization" all about?

**Mon, Oct, 18 / Session 8: Culture Change and Prejudice**

- Peter Stearns, *Culture Change*, Ch. 9.

Discussion question: What are the cultural issues and complications in the #MeToo movement? Is it fair to impose new standards on past behaviors? Why has all this become a big deal in contemporary culture?

**Mon, Oct, 25| Session 9: Mobilizing Culture Change**

- Introduction, Chapters 1&2 from George Chauncey, *Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). Available as an e-book through the library or as PDFs on Blackboard.
- Due: second short paper: what does the gay rights movement suggest about mobilizing culture change? Would these "lessons" be applicable to current efforts to change race culture, or are the situations too different?

Discussion questions: How can culture change best be promoted? What is the international status of gay rights?

**Mon, Nov 1| Session 10: Cultural Meaning of Nationalism**

- Smith, Anthony D. "National Identity and Vernacular Mobilization in Europe." *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 2 (April 2011): 223–256. (Available on blackboard and through Mason library website)

Discussion questions: what is the culture of nationalism, and why did it, and does it, attract such strong emotions? what is distinctive about contemporary American culture?

**Mon, Nov 8 | Session 11: Student Topic Presentations**

Written prospectus due, 500 words or so.

**Mon, Nov 15 | Session 12: Culture Change, Contacts and Globalization**

- Peter Stearns, *Culture Change*, Ch. 8.
- Peter Stearns, *Globalization in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 98-179 (esp. 119-27, 166-71)
- Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3) (1993) DOI.10.2307/20045621
- **Discussion questions:** What are the plusses and minuses of cultural globalization? What are the alternatives? Should human rights standards be imposed on all cultures?

**Mon, Nov 22 | Session 13: Two (partly) Cultural Issues: Environment and Family**

Discussion questions: Is it possible to accelerate concerns about environmental change? Are there culture change techniques to apply here? What are the current major issues in contemporary family culture—marriage, birth rate, etc.

- Peter Stearns, *Culture Change*, Conclusion.
- Sander L. van der Linden et. al, “The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change as a Gateway Belief: Experimental Evidence,” *PLoS ONE* 10(2): e0118489.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0118489.
- Stearns, Peter. “A Decline of the Child?” March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021. (available on blackboard)

**NOV 24- Nov 28 | THANKSGIVING RECESS**

**Mon, Nov. 29 | Session 14: Is American culture in deep crisis? Can an understanding of culture change contribute to current discussions?**

- Ross Douthat and Ezra Klein *Vox* JUNE 17 2020; Joseph Hogan, Los Angeles Review of Books, Apr 1, 2020
- Robert Putnam, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America” *American Prospect* Dec 19 2001

Discussion questions: What are the issues in current American culture? What is happening to American religion? Are other societies displaying similar symptoms?

**Take Home Final\*\*\*\*\* Dates TBA**

Appendix 1: Here are topics for the Session 4 Assignment. Three or maximum four students will work on one of these topics, communicating with each other before submitting (individually) a final paper; they can share research, ideas etc. Groups will be announced by end of Week 1.

1. What have been the cultural dimensions of the dispute over fluoridation of water? Are there any contemporary “lessons” in this?
2. How can the Me/Too movement be seen as a result of culture change?
3. What are the cultural issues in the decline of boxing (one of top spectator sports in US in 1900, with many amateurs as well)
4. What are the cultural issues in the US debate over gun ownership (why has this proved to be a distinctive feature of American culture)
5. What have been the cultural results of the decline of Marxism in Russia
6. In 1750 if an American were to lie about his age, he or she would claim to be older than real age; in 1850, same scenario, would claim to be younger. How might this be explored as a topic in culture change?
7. Is Saudi Arabia attempting major culture change today?
8. How did suicide stop being seen as a sin in Western culture? What interpretation replaced sin?
9. One of the most striking features of modern societies is the low birth rate. Does the change from high to low (8 kids average to less than 2 average) have cultural implications?
10. Why do schools no longer use dunce cap?
11. What are the cultural dimensions of the growing attachment to pets in societies like the US, Japan?
12. Take a look at two recent international happiness polls: besides reflecting differences in living standards, what cultural issues do the polls suggest?
13. Why, over the past several decades, have many Americans believed that crime rates are higher than they actually are?
14. Is an effort to avoid crying an innate feature of masculinity?
15. What are three characteristics of a consumer culture?
16. Can the contemporary United States be described as a militaristic culture?
17. How might the desegregation of the US military be handled as a topic in culture change?

Many of these are big topics. Assumption is, each “team” will do a bit of online research on the topic chosen – not a deep dive – but particularly devote some thought to a sensible if tentative response. Each team should feel free to communicate with instructor at any stage. This is meant to be exploratory, fun, not exhaustive or exhausting. Do remember to emphasize the culture aspect – beliefs and values.

Students should send their preferred topics (ranked 1,2,3) to Stearns by Aug. 26; he will then make selections (can’t promise to honor preferences) and define teams accordingly, by Aug. 27. Students who do not specify choice will simply be assigned.