

Social Inequality—Soc 209

Fall 2007

Wellesley College

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Office hours (329 PNE) Tues. 3-4; Wed. 10-12; & by appointment

Course Description and Overview

This course examines the distribution of key social resources--wealth, power, and status--to groups and individuals, as well as theoretical explanations of how unequal patterns of distribution are produced, maintained, and challenged. Special consideration will be given to how race, ethnicity, and gender intersect with social class to produce different life experiences for people in various groups in the United States. A few of the questions that will be covered include:

- What is (in)equality? Where does it come from? Is inequality ever justified?
- What is privilege and how is it reproduced?
- What is social class? This is the “land of opportunity”--does social class matter in America?
- How are social inequalities reproduced across generations?
- How are inequalities based on class, race, and gender interconnected?
- Does education create an equal playing field?
- What causes poverty? Who are the poor? What can be done about poverty?
- Can social inequalities be reduced, and if so, how?

Required Texts

The following books are available at Wellesley College Bookstore. They are also available on reserve at the library:

Kendall, Diana. 2002. *The Power of Good Deeds: Privileged Women and the Social Reproduction of the Upper Class*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

MacLeod, Jay. 1995. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Conley, Dalton. 1999. *Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth, and Social Policy in America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Rank, Mark Robert. 2004. *One Nation, Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hays, Sharon. 2003. *Flat Broke With Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Additional readings will be available through e-reserve.

Course Requirements

Attendance, preparation, and class participation	15%
Midterm exam	15%
Social mobility and reproduction essay	25%
Class presentation on final paper research topic	15%
Final paper	30%

Proposed Course Schedule

Month	Mon.	Tuesday	Wed.	Thurs.	Friday	Read & Prepare for Class
S E P T E M B E R	3	4 What is inequality? Overview	5	6	7 What are social resources?	F - *Weber "Class, Status, Party"
	10	11 Origins of inequality	12	13	14 Origins; Measures of inequality	T – Simulation instructions F - *Dahrendorf "On the Origin of Inequality among Men" Kingsley Davis & Wilbert E. Moore "Some Principles of Stratification" <i>American Sociological Review</i> (J-Stor) Melvin M. Tumin "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis" <i>American Sociological Review</i> (J-Stor)
	17	18 The great debate	19	20	21 Status power	T - *deBotton "Meritocracy" from <i>Status Anxiety</i> *Loewen "The Land of Opportunity" F – Kendall <i>The Power of Good Deeds</i> —first half
	24	25 Status; the reproduction of privilege	26	27	28 Class & Culture	T – Kendall <i>The Power of Good Deeds</i> —finish book F - *Brooks "The rise of the educated class" from <i>Bobos in Paradise</i>
O C T O B E R	1	2 Class & Culture	3	4	5 Sum Up & Review	T – *Kendall "Splintered Wooden Frames: The Middle Class" from <i>Framing Class</i> *Lamont "Assessing 'People Above' and 'People Below'" from <i>The Dignity of Working Men</i>
	8 Fall	9 Break	10	11	12 Midterm Exam	
	15	16 Social mobility	17 Topic consult	18	19 Education & social mobility	T – MacLeod <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> chapters 1-3 W – you must schedule a meeting with the professor to discuss your final paper topic no later than this date! F – MacLeod <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> chapters 4-6
	22	23 Social mobility & social reproduction	24	25	26 What is poverty?	T – MacLeod <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> chapters 7, 8, & 11 F – Rank <i>One Nation, Underprivileged</i> chapters 1-3
	29	30 How poverty affects us	31	1	2 Race: The Power of an Illusion	T – Rank <i>One Nation, Underprivileged</i> chapters 4-6 F – Conley <i>Being Black, Living in the Red</i> chapters 1-2
N O V E M B E R	5	6 Tanner Conf.	7	8	9 Race & privilege	F – Conley <i>Being Black...</i> chapter 6 *Tatum "Defining Racism"
	12	13 Gender inequalities Essay Due	14	15	16 Gender inequalities	T – Hays <i>Flat Broke With Children</i> chapters 1-3 F – Hays <i>Flat Broke...</i> chapters 4-6
	19	20 Responding to poverty Bibliography due	21 Happy	22 Thanks	23 giving!	T – Hays <i>Flat Broke...</i> chapter 8 Remember to schedule a consultation with the public speaking tutor at least 2 days before your presentation!
	26	27 Responding to inequality	28	29	30 Student presentations	T – Rank <i>One Nation...</i> chapters 7-8 * Schor "Towards a New Politics of Consumption" Remember to schedule a consultation with the public speaking tutor at least 2 days before your presentation!

D E C E M B E R	3	4 Student presentations	5	6	7 Student presentations	Remember to schedule a consultation with the public speaking tutor at least 2 days before your presentation!
	10	11 Wrap-up	12	13	14	T – Rank <i>One Nation...</i> chapter 9 *Johnson “What can we do?” *Loeb “The real Rosa Parks” and “You have to pick your team”
	17	18	19 FINAL PAPER DUE BY 4:00 PM	20		

A Few Notes & Course Policies

The topics covered in this course touch upon several issues (class, race, discrimination, etc.) that Americans are often uncomfortable discussing openly. Consider the following as guidelines for our class discussions:

- Try to participate in discussions with as much candor as you can summon. Be sensitive to others, but do not shy away from difficult topics.
- Listen and learn from your classmates’ perspectives.
- You do not always have to agree with me or with each other. However, you must always treat others with respect when you express your disagreement.

I strongly encourage students to schedule an appointment to meet with me individually in my office at least once during the first half of the semester. This can be either during my office hours or at some other agreed-upon time. If at any point in the semester you are experiencing difficulty with the course material or requirements, please make an appointment to see me. I cannot help you if you do not communicate with me.

Please come to class on time. The class will begin at 1:30.

I will gladly make necessary accommodations for students with disabilities. Those needing accommodations are encouraged to work with the staff in the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center in Clapp Library to make appropriate arrangements.

Except in cases of emergency (such as hospitalization, death of a family member), late papers will be penalized a full letter grade per day late. Minor illnesses, over-scheduling, and perfectionism do not constitute emergencies. Similarly, except for special cases, I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. However, I know that major life disruptions can occur during the semester; in such cases, please let me know what you need as early as possible so that I may work with you to help you be successful in this course.

Academic honesty is expected of all students in accordance with the Wellesley Honor Code. Suspected honor violations relating to course work in this class will be reported to the General Judiciary.

Essay Assignment

Social Mobility and Social Reproduction

Objective

The purpose of this essay assignment is to give you an opportunity to demonstrate your command of course readings and your ability to apply sociological analysis to matters of inequality that are directly relevant to your own life experience.

Assignment

Write an essay about social mobility and/or social reproduction as illustrated by your own family. Consider several generations of your family's history and take into account any of the following that is applicable or helpful: privilege, income, wealth, occupational prestige, educational levels, race/ethnicity, immigration, political involvement, authority, gender roles, aspirations, status symbols, etc. You may delve as deeply as you like into your own personal story but resist the temptation to turn this assignment into a simple narrative about your family. Your essay should advance and develop a clear argument about social power and mobility illustrated by a case study that happens to be your family.¹

Guidelines

Maximum length: 10 pages, double-spaced. Essays should integrate and synthesize several relevant course readings. Use a consistent citation style and include a list of references. Staple your essay!

Deadline

Essays are to be turned in no later than Tuesday, November 13 in class.

¹ In the unlikely event that you are unable or unwilling to write about your own family's history, an alternate essay assignment can be arranged in consultation with the professor. Alternative arrangements should be made at least one month before the due date.

Research Assignment for Final Paper and Class Presentation Poverty and Vulnerability

One of the most striking effects of social inequality is the myriad of ways that impoverished people are vulnerable. Poverty is not just a circumstance of economic vulnerability; people living in poverty are more likely to suffer from malnutrition and negative health outcomes, experience state interference in their personal freedoms, be victims of natural disasters and environmental pollution, live in high-crime areas and to be victims of violent crime, be preyed upon by dubious financial schemes, have access only to substandard childcare and educational institutions, and so on.

For this course you will select, in consultation with the professor, a topic of research into a particular vulnerability experienced by the poor. You will research your topic independently throughout the semester and present your findings in an informative presentation to the class as well as a final paper. I want to allow you as much freedom as possible to follow your own interests and design your own research project; therefore I am not providing a very rigid framework for this assignment. However, I do not want you to feel adrift—you are very strongly encouraged to consult with me in selecting a topic, planning your research, and preparing both your presentation and your final paper.

General guidelines for presentations:

You should plan to give a 20-minute informative presentation to the class, followed by a few minutes of Q&A. Presentations should be polished and rehearsed and should have the objective of informing the class in an interesting and engaging way about the topic you have researched. In preparation for your presentation, you must schedule a consultation with the PLTC public speaking tutor for the class. You should plan to meet with the tutor no later than 2 days prior to your scheduled presentation date.

General guidelines for final papers:

Maximum length is 20 pages, double-spaced.

Use ASA reference style.

Key dates to remember:

Consultation with professor to select topic	by October 17
Library research instruction	TBA
Research bibliography due	Nov. 20
Meet with public speaking tutor	at least 2 days before presentation
Class presentations	Nov. 30, Dec. 4 & 7
Final paper due	Wed., December 19 by 4:00 pm