

Social Inequality—Soc 209

Fall 2009

Wellesley College

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Office hours (329 PNE) Monday 2-4, Tuesday 3-4

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. (Note: We will be reading only selections from this text. You may decide whether you prefer to purchase the book or to photocopy the assigned pages.)

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	20%
Social mobility and reproduction essay	25%
Class presentation	10%
Final paper	30%

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 11:00.

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.

I do not ordinarily distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. However, given current concerns about the H1N1 virus, I ask that you use good common sense in following the recommendations from Health Services regarding flu and flu-like symptoms. If you experience any kind of major life disruption during the semester, 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.

Course Schedule

This course schedule will be adjusted as necessary; changes to the schedule will be announced in class and posted to the FirstClass course conference.

Readings marked with a * are available in the e-reserve on the course conference.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Prepare for Class</u>	<u>Topic for Lecture & Discussion</u>
9/8		What is inequality? Course overview
9/11	*Loewen “The Land of Opportunity” Read about Gates arrest in July 2009. Think about and be prepared to discuss what kinds of social resources, power, and inequality were involved (not who was right or wrong).	What are social resources?
9/15	Read simulation instructions *deBotton “Meritocracy” from <i>Status Anxiety</i> *Dahrendorf “On the Origins of Inequality among Men”	In-class simulation exercise Origins of inequality
9/18	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) *Claude S. Fischer, et. al. “Inequality by Design”	Origins of inequality Do we need inequality?
9/22	Kendall <i>The Power of Good Deeds</i> – read first half	Status power
9/25	Kendall <i>The Power of Good Deeds</i> – finish book	Status: the reproduction of privilege
9/29	*Brooks “The rise of the educated class” from <i>Bobos in Paradise</i> *Kendall “Splintered Wooden Frames: The middle class” from <i>Framing Class</i>	Class & culture
10/2	*Lareau “Unequal Childhoods” *Lamont “Assessing ‘People Above’ and ‘People Below’” from <i>The Dignity of Working Men</i>	Class & culture
10/6		Sum up & review

10/9	Midterm Exam	Midterm Exam
10/13	MacLeod <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> chapters 1-3	Social mobility
10/16	MacLeod <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> chapters 4-6	Education & social mobility
10/20	MacLeod <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> chapters 7, 8, & 11	Social mobility & social reproduction
10/23	*Wilson selections from <i>The Declining Significance of Race</i> *Conley selections from <i>Being Black, Living in the Red</i>	Race: The Power of an Illusion
10/27	*Feagin "The Continuing Significance of Race" *Tatum "Defining Racism" *Bonilla-Silva "Racism Without 'Racists'"	Race & privilege
10/30	Rank <i>One Nation, Underprivileged</i> chapter 1 Social mobility & reproduction essay due	What is poverty? Social mobility & reproduction essay due
11/3		Tanner Conference—no classes
11/6	Rank <i>One Nation, Underprivileged</i> chapters 2-3	How poverty affects us
11/10	Hays <i>Flat Broke With Children</i> chapters 1-3	Gender inequalities
11/13	Hays <i>Flat Broke With Children</i> chapters 4-6	Gender inequalities
11/17		Student presentations
11/20		Student presentations
11/24		Student presentations
11/27	Happy Thanksgiving!	Happy Thanksgiving!
12/1		Student presentations
12/4	Rank <i>One Nation...</i> chapters 7-8 Hays <i>Flat Broke...</i> chapter 8	Responding to poverty & inequality
12/8	Rank <i>One Nation...</i> chapter 9	Wrap up
12/21	Final Paper due by 4:30 pm	Final Paper due by 4:30 pm

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 Friday, October 30 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, lack access to adequate housing, be preyed upon by dubious financial schemes, have access only to substandard childcare and educational institutions, be negatively portrayed by the media, lack political representation and a public voice for their concerns, 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 15-20 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	TBA
Library research instruction	TBA
Research bibliography due	TBA
Meet with public speaking tutor	at least 2 days before presentation
Class presentations	Nov. 13, 17, 20, and 24
Final paper due	Mon., Dec. 21 by 4:30 pm