

## Social Inequality—Soc 209

Fall 2005

Wellesley College

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Office hours:  
Monday 3-4, Tuesday 10-12  
& by appointment

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### 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. In addition to global inequalities, 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?
- Who gets ahead? Or, What is social mobility?
- 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 inequality 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 in the e-reserve conference.

Each student will also read one of the following as part of the class case study project:

- Erikson, Kai. 1972. *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Fothergill, Alice. 2004. *Heads Above Water: Gender, Class, and Family in the Grand Forks Flood*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Klinenberg, Eric. 2002. *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## Course Requirements

Preparation, attendance, and class participation	15%
Midterm exam	15%
Social mobility and reproduction essay	20%
NOLA case study	
Media contributions	5%
Data presentation	10%
Case study paper	15%
Take-home final exam	20%

## Course Policies

The topics covered in this course touch upon several issues 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. Our goal is neither persuasion nor group consensus but learning from talking things out and listening to one another.

I will gladly make necessary accommodations for students with disabilities. Those needing accommodations are encouraged to work with either Jim Wice or members of the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center to make appropriate arrangements.

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.

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.

\*\*\*Disclaimer: The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus. Any changes will be announced in class and posted on the course conference.

## 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.

### Parameters

Maximum length: 9 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!

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### New Orleans, LA Case Study

In light of the tragedy caused by and following Hurricane Katrina, we are all focused on the issues of social inequality that were revealed and illuminated in New Orleans and in the US. Throughout the semester, the class will undertake a case study of New Orleans, Louisiana. The purpose of the case study will be to understand the social structure and hierarchy of New Orleans during the past few decades in order to understand the social cleavages that were unmasked by what we saw following Katrina's devastation. The class will work interdependently to identify the key variables that we wish to investigate, to compile data that describes the recent history of New Orleans' social structure, and to compile a database of media coverage of the disaster and its aftermath.

Following our initial data collection, the class will divide up to read three insightful sociological analyses of other natural disasters:

*Everything in its Path*, by Kai Erikson

*Heat Wave*, by Eric Klinenberg

*Heads Above Water*, by Alice Fothergill

These books will provide both models for the way that sociological analysis can help us to understand the effects of natural disasters; they will also provide relevant comparative information for better understanding the situation in New Orleans.

Using the data and resources compiled by the class and the example/comparison of these books, students will write case study analysis papers.

### **Timeline for the case study project:**

Sept. 12 Discussion and planning

Sept. 26 At least part of class time will be allotted as a work day for data gathering teams

**Before** fall break (Oct. 7), each student must contribute at least 5 unique media articles to the class database. These should be informative media coverage that you think will be helpful in understanding the response to the disaster and useful for writing case study papers. These may be newspaper articles, blog columns, tv or radio transcripts, official reports, links to helpful websites or video clips, etc. However, remember that the shelf-life of news media is rather short and that you will be writing papers in the second half of the semester. If at all possible, you should include a copy of the item in your posting rather than simply submitting a link or url. Be sure to include a full citation for every item. It will help if you to try to include multiple viewpoints in the database. You may not contribute an item that is identical or very similar to one already posted in the database.

Oct. 13 Data-gathering teams will present their findings to the class. These should be summarized and displayed in a useful format. All findings will be made available for the entire class to use. The data gathered by teams is intended to supplement the media database and should therefore rely primarily on either official sources (such as the Census Bureau) or scholarly works supported by empirical evidence (such as journal articles or official reports). Be sure to include complete references and citations for all information.

Following the data presentations, students will independently read one of the three books we will use for comparison. The class will be divided evenly to cover all three books. The deadline for completing your book will be Dec. 1.

Before Nov. 21, each student must contribute two additional recent media items about New Orleans and/or hurricane response (these should be items that have been produced since mid-October. Don't forget the citations!

Dec. 5 & Dec. 8 Class presentations – Details TBA

Dec. 12 Case study papers due

## Course Outline

*Any changes will be announced and posted on the course conference.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Read &amp; Prepare</b>	<b>Class Topic</b>
Th 9/8		What is Inequality? Get acquainted; overview of semester
M 9/12	*Weber "Class, Status, Party"	What are social resources? Planning for NOLA case study
Th 9/15	Simulation instructions (course conference) *Dahrendorf "On the Origin of Inequality among Men" from <i>Essays in the Theory of Society</i>	Inequality simulation; Origins of inequality
M 9/19	Kingsley Davis & Wilbert E. Moore. "Some Principles of Stratification" <i>American Sociological Review</i> . Available on J-Stor Melvin M. Tumin. "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis" <i>American Sociological Review</i> . Available on J-Stor	Origins of inequality; Measures of inequality
Th 9/22	*deBotton "Meritocracy" from <i>Status Anxiety</i> *Loewen "The Land of Opportunity"	The great debate about inequality
M 9/26	Kendall <i>The Power of Good Deeds</i> – read first half	Case study work day
Th 9/29	Finish reading Kendall <i>The Power of Good Deeds</i>	Status power and the reproduction of privilege
M 10/3	*Brooks "The rise of the educated class" from <i>Bobos in Paradise</i>	Class and culture
Th 10/6	*Lamont "Assessing 'People Above' and 'People Below'" from <i>The Dignity of Working Men</i>	Class and culture, cont'd.
M 10/10	<b>Media contributions must be made before fall break</b>	fall break
Th 10/13		<b>Data reports for NOLA case study</b>
M 10/17	MacLeod, Jay <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> chapters 1-3	Social mobility: status attainment studies
Th 10/20	MacLeod, Jay <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> chapters 4-6	Education and social mobility
M 10/24	MacLeod, Jay <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> Chapters 7-8; Chapter 11 (skim chapters 9-10)	Social mobility and social reproduction
Th 10/27		<b>Midterm exam</b>
M 10/31	Conley, Dalton <i>Being Black, Living in the Red</i> chapters 1-2	Race: The Power of an Illusion
Th 11/3	Conley, Dalton <i>Being Black...</i> chapter 6	Race: The Power of an Illusion

M 11/7	*Tatum "Defining Racism" *Lieberson "Understanding Ascriptive Stratification" <b>Social mobility essay due</b>	Race & privilege
Th 11/10	Rank, Mark <i>One Nation, Underprivileged</i> chapters 1-3	What is poverty?
M 11/14	Rank, Mark <i>One Nation...</i> chapters 4-6	How does poverty affect us?
Th 11/17	Hays, Sharon <i>Flat Broke, With Children</i> chapters 1-3	Gender inequality
M 11/21	Hays <i>Flat Broke...</i> chapters 4-6 <b>Media contributions must be made before this date</b>	Gender inequality
M 11/28	Hays <i>Flat Broke...</i> chapters 7-8	Responding to poverty
Th 12/1	Rank, Mark <i>One Nation...</i> chapters 7-8	Responding to poverty
M 12/5		<b>Class presentations</b>
Th 12/8		<b>Class presentations</b>
M 12/12	<b>NOLA case study papers due</b> Rank <i>One Nation...</i> chapter 9 *Johnson, Allan "What can we do?" *Loeb, Paul R. "The real Rosa Parks" & "You have to pick your team"	Making a difference  <b>Take-Home Final Exam Assigned</b>