

SOCI 110/Fall 2010
Introduction to Sociology
Social Inequality
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Office Hours:
M & W: 4:00 to 4:30pm

I COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides students with a critical perspective in interpreting social inequalities in the US and globally. Mainly the course will have students debate two perspectives on the social origins of inequality and the political and ethical consequences such perspectives embody. The first is what we will call the internalist/culture of poverty thesis which explains inequalities in terms of characteristics belonging to particular groups (e.g., cultural or religious beliefs, socialization and childrearing practices, educational and vocabulary attainment, modernizationist discourse of developed and underdeveloped societies...). The second perspective we will explore is the relational/structural theory of social and global inequality. Sociologists of this sort prefer to focus on asymmetrical power relations **between** groups (e.g., symbolic markers of distinctions; cultural capital; the social construction of gender, class, and race; core-periphery capitalist relations between poor and rich countries...).

II COURSE OBJECTIVE: The objective of the course is to provide students with sophisticated sociological studies on both sides of the debate dealing with social and global inequalities. The course attempts to demonstrate that even though many of the authors we cover apply social scientific methods, the fact that they come at the same empirical evidence from different theoretical perspectives ultimately determines their interpretation and understanding of the causes of social inequalities. Here students may discover that the lens through which they look may turn out to be a political, moral, and ethical choice. For the second objective, students discover that these two perspectives, when combined in a dialectical way, may provide an alternative perspective than either has to offer in isolation. For instance, instead of seeing socialization practices of the poor as tied to lack of objective skills required to become upwardly mobile, the student can learn to combine this perspective with the structural perspective so as to see those skills not simply as objective characteristics but as socially constructed – in other words as symbolic markers of distinctions (i.e., as class, race, gender, and global **performances**) used unconsciously by the elite of the world to reproduce their class, gender, racial and global hegemony. This way, as Julie Bettie has argued in her *Women Without Class*, instead of seeing certain “cultural traits” as dysfunctional or pathological and blaming a specific group, the focus is on changing social and global cultural constructs of rich and poor that produces poverty and inequality in the first place. It is the highly racialized, genderized, and classed constructs of social inequalities that have to be first deconstructed before we can hope to alleviate those inequalities. Hence, “culture” is a big part of the story, maybe just not in the way many of us think it is.

III GRADING – total points = 100

94 to 100 = A	74 to 76 = C
90 to 93 = A-	70 to 73 = C-
87 to 89 = B+	67 to 69 = D+
84 to 86 = B	64 to 66 = D
80 to 83 = B-	60 to 63 = D
77 to 79 = C+	0 to 59 = F

TWO ORAL EXAMS (60 POINTS) – 30 points each x 2 (60 points)

JOURNALS DUE EACH CLASS MEETING (15 points total): For each class where readings are assigned, you are expected to write (one to two pages, typed, double-spaced) a journal entry in which you reflect on the readings. You can get creative, incorporating the readings into a movie you saw, a discussion you had with a friend or family member, found possible venues towards a future career idea, or simply a concept or an idea you found interesting or troubling. You are expected to show me this at the beginning of each class, making sure to receive a signature from me. This is your responsibility. A failure to get my signature during class time negates any possibility of receiving it afterwards. I will not grade these until the very end of the course. I will at that time ask you to hand in your entire journal for grading. The 1st week you must hand in the journal to receive comments, but after that I will no longer provide comments. You are to hold on to these journals to the end of the semester, at which point I will collect them and grade them in one sitting. **You may not hand in journals late. If you are absent on a given day, your journal for that day will not count.** A failure to hand in a journal (even if it is lost) will result in zero points for the journal grade. Your journal grade will also be determined by how will you “deconstruct” the readings (see the example of the Onion on deconstructing Bandito Burrito’s take-out menu, available on moodle).

GROUP LED DISCUSSIONS: 5 POINTS

Each student will be assigned a group on the first day of class. The group assigned to lead discussion is responsible for

1. **TWO PAGE PAPER:** Each member must send to the entire class via moodle a 2-page word.doc critical essay on the readings for the day. The essay must be delivered via moodle 24 hours before the class meeting. This essay ought to mainly discuss the utility of the said readings, their usefulness, if any, with your own thinking about a particular issue related to your developing research interest, and if it could be applied to other unforeseen issues not discussed in the reading. **This is in addition to your required journal.** So yes, you still have to do your journal as well.
2. **INCORPORATE RECOMMENDED READINGS:** The group must in addition critically read the recommended essays on moodle and deconstruct them in a manner relevant to our larger themes of the course.
3. **AS A GROUP, FORMULATE CLASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** The group must meet prior to class and formulate good discussion questions for the class. These must be typed and distributed to every student the day of the class.

4. LEAD CLASS DISCUSSION: The group leads class discussion.

I will grade you on the quality of your paper, the incorporation of the recommended readings into the discussion, your leadership presence in the discussion, and the quality of the class discussion.

CLASS PARTICIPATION – 20 points:

Each student is expected to come to class prepared. A failure to participate in class will result in fewer points awarded. A student who comes prepared to class and constructively participates regularly will receive all 20 points.

CLASS ATTENDANCE – You may miss up to two sessions, after which you forfeit half a letter grade for each absence thereafter.

COMING TO CLASS LATE: You are allowed two tardiness, after which every two tardiness counts as one absence.

EXCUSED ABSENCES: Since you are permitted two absences without penalty, those two function as your buffer for emergency days. Thus there is no need of sending me an email asking to be excused for an absence. Once you miss two absences, you will not be excused even if you are ill.

ORAL EXAMS MISSED: Only medical or family related absences will be Accepted. Documented material must be handed in to the instructor. If excused and permitted to take a make-up, be prepared for a more difficult exam than the original.

IV Required Texts

W.G. Roy, *Making Societies*, Pine Forge Press

Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*

Julie Bettie, *Women Without Class*

V Films:

Race: The Power of an Illusion (v.3: “The House We Live In”)

Anchorman

People Like Us

VI COURSE OUTLINE

Part I: Social Inequalities: Two Perspectives

W 9/08: *Overview of the Course*: This class will be more important than getting married, being potty-trained, or having your first baby.

- a) The Sociological Imagination
- b) The Cultural/Internalist Perspective versus the Relational/Structural Perspective
- c) In-class reading exercise: The Onion, Deconstructing Bandito Burrito's Take-Out Menu (moodle). Notice, instead of trying to understand the labeled, the grad student is turning the lens onto the labeler or narrator.
- d) In-class reading exercise: Cosby vs Dyson Debate

M 9/13: *The Relational versus the Internal*: (Lecture & COV large class discussion)

W.G. Roy, *Making Societies*, pp. 5-18 and 22-24

W.G. Roy Chapter 4, "Race" in his *Making Societies*

W 9/15: Who is to blame for poverty? Is it "their" culture or something much larger?

FILM: *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (v.3: "The House We Live In")
(food from Shish)

M 9/20: *Explaining Racial Inequality I*: COV small group & large class discussion:

Jackson, "How Washington Changed the Housing Market" (moodle)

W 9/22: *Explaining Racial Inequality II*: GROUP ONE LEADS DISCUSSION

William Julius Wilson (ch1), "From Institutional to Jobless Ghetto" (moodle)

Dinesh D'Souza, "Raparation Fallacy: What African-Americans Owe America" (moodle)

M 9/27: *Explaining Racial Inequality III*: Fishbowl day

Gladwell's chapter on Bill Gates and Microsoft, It's all about location?

Part II: Explaining Global Inequality

W 9/29: *How do we account for global inequality?*: (Lecture and COV large class discussion)

Alvin So: "Dependency Perspective" (moodle)

M 10/4: *The Internalist/Culturalist versus the Externalist/Relational Debate I*: (COV small group and large class discussion):

Lawrence Harrison, "Promoting Progressive Cultural Change" (moodle)

Lappe & J. Collins, "Why Can't People Feed Themselves?" (moodle)

W 10/6: *The Internalist/Culturalist versus the Externalist/Relational Debate II*: GROUP TWO LEADS DISCUSSION

J.M. Blaut, "Explaining 1492" (moodle)

M 10/11: ORAL EXAM ONE WITH PROFESSOR: You'll get 40 minutes to discuss all of the above readings with the professor (30 points total). The professor will role-play a character who maintains certain political views about racial and global inequalities. I'll expect you to utilize the course readings to produce a coherent and legitimate response to the views posed by my role-playing character.

Part III: Explaining Gender Inequality

W 10/13: *Gender in comparative historical perspective*: (Lecture and COV large class discussion)

W.G. Roy, Ch. 5

M 10/18: *Are men and women of two different cultures I*: (COV small group and class discussion):

Faludi, "The Backlash Brain Trust" (especially pp. 318-331) (moodle)

W 10/20: FILM: *Anchorman*

M 10/25: *Are men and women of two different cultures II?*: GROUP THREE LEADS DISCUSSION:

The Crawford and Yancey Debate (moodle)

Barbara Risman, "Socialization Into Gender" (moodle)

W 10/27: FALL BREAK (NO CLASS)

M 11/1: *The Consequences of Constructing Gender as Two Cultures*: Fishbowl I

Barrie Thorne, "Do Boys and Girls Have Different Cultures?" (moodle)

W 11/3: *The Consequences of Constructing Gender as Two Cultures*: Fishbowl II

Part IV: Class Inequality

M 11/8: *Class & the problem of inequality & poverty*: (Lecture & COV large class discussion)

W.G. Roy, "Class," chapter 6 of his book, *Making Societies*

Barbara Ehrenreich, "The Middle Class on the Defensive" (moodle)

W 11/10: FILM: *People Like Us*

M 11/15: *Class Status in Crisis*: (COV small group discussion):

Julie Bettie, *Women Without Class*, ch. 1

Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, ch. 1

W 11/17: *Is Class inequality due to culture or structure?*: COV small group and large class discussion

Julie Bettie, *Women Without Class*, ch. 3

Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, chs. 3

M 11/22: *Is Class inequality due to culture or structure?* GROUP FOUR LEADS DISCUSSION:

Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, chs 5 & 6

Julie Bettie, *Women Without Class*, ch. 4

W 11/24: Fishbowl I [THANKSGIVING]

M 11/29: Fishbowl II

Julie Bettie, *Women Without Class*, ch. 5

Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, chs 7 & 8

*JOURNALS DUE: Students must hand in their entire journal (please staple them chronologically by date)

Part V: So why has inequality worsened over the past few decades? Naomi Klein

W 12/1 & R 12/2: ORAL EXAM TWO WITH PROFESSOR:

You'll get 40 minutes to discuss all the readings in parts III and IV with the professor (30 points total). The professor will role-play a character who maintains certain political views about gender and class inequalities. I'll expect you to utilize the course readings to produce a coherent and legitimate response to the views posed by my role-playing character.

M 12/06: Large COV class discussion: Klein, chapters 3, 14, 15 AND Reich, How to End the Great Recession: Share the Prosperity (both on moodle)

W 12/08: Wrapping-up (food Shish)