

SC072, Inequality in America
Professor Joelle Sano (sanojo@bc.edu)

T/TH 4:30-5:45
Fall 2007

Office Hours:

Tuesday 3:00-4:15, and by appt
Office Hours in The Coffee Bar, McElroy Commons
Mailbox #68, McGuinn 410

Course Description

The topic of social stratification and class inequality is complex and controversial. Some theorists view social inequality as a product of different levels of achievement while others argue that social inequality is primarily as a product of exploitation. Some theorists view social class as a measure of accumulated status, wealth, or power whereas others view social class and class relations as complex causal mechanisms that generate and reproduce inequalities. While some theorists understand social class primarily in economic terms, others have a more expansive view, and include gender, race, culture, and even the environment. In this course we will evaluate these various debates on social class and inequality.

This course has two main parts. Part One provides an introduction to social class and inequality by way of an investigation of several sociological theories. This includes consideration of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Thorstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu as well as contemporary critiques and reconstructions of these perspectives. In the process, we will critically examine key concepts and theories pertaining to inequality and social class, such as "class consciousness", "social mobility", and the "reproduction" of social class.

Part Two examines class inequity in American society. It not only describes how the rich, the poor, and the middle classes live, but also how they relate to one another. In this section we also explore how race and gender relate to class inequity and investigate how institutions, such as public education, may help to perpetuate inequality.

Reading The following books are required.

Eckstein, Rick and Kevin J. Delaney. 2003. *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums: The Battle over Building Sports Stadiums*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Ehrenrich, Barbara. 2002. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. New York:Owl Press.

Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. University of California Press.

McLeod, Jay. 2004. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. West View Press.

***Additional required reading is posted on the Library's Course Reserves page. Please complete readings on time (see course outline).

Assignments

Please note this is a writing intensive course. To fulfill this requirement you will write three papers (4-5 pages each) and complete a three part budget project.

There will be an in-class midterm worth 20% of your grade and an in-class final worth 25% of your grade. These exams will be a mixture of multiple choice and short essays and will require you to be familiar with in-class material and all readings/handouts.

The remaining 10% of your grade comes from *class participation*. If your attendance is excellent, you will receive anywhere from 7-10 points depending on your actual participation. If your attendance is less than excellent you will receive anywhere from 0-6 points depending on your actual participation. I define non-excellent attendance as missing more than three (3) classes without an official university excuse from an official university office. This policy begins on 9/11.

NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED UNLESS AN EXTENSION IS GRANTED BY ME BEFORE THE DUE DATE OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Grading

Class Attendance & Participation	10%
Budget Project	15%
Papers (3 at 10% each)	30%
Midterm	20%
Final	25%

Important Dates

9/27	Paper 1 Due
10/18	Budget Project Due
10/30	Midterm
11/15	Paper 2 Due
12/4	Paper 3 Due
12/13	Final Exam (Subject to Change-check exam schedule to confirm)

There are no make-up exams in the class. Please make arrangements to attend both the in class midterm and final exam.

Course Outline (Readings outside of required books are available on course reserves)

I. Introduction (September 4, 6)

Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination*. Ch.1

Scott, Janny and David Leonhart. 2005. "Shadowy Lines That Still Divide." *The New York Times*. May 15.

www.Inequality.org (peruse)

II. Theories of Class- Karl Marx & Max Weber (September 11, 13, 18)

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. "The Communist Manifesto" (Except-course reserves)

Cangialosi, Jason. "Marx's Theories on Social Class Applied to Modern-Day Brooklyn." *Associated Press*. November 13, 2005.

Weber, Max. "Class, Status, Party" (Except-course reserves)

III. Theories of Class-Thornstein Veblen & Pierre Bourdieu (September 20, 25)

Veblen, Thornstein. *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Ch. 3

McCormick, Ken. 2006. *Veblen in Plain English*. Ch. 9 & 10

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. "The Sense of Distinction." (online reserve under Schor & Holt)
Brooks, David. "Pillars of Cultural Capital." *New York Times*. October 6, 2005.

****Paper 1 Due 9/27****

IV. Historical & Contemporary Pictures of Class Inequality (September 27, October 2, 4)

Piven, Francis & Richard A. Cloward. 1993. *Regulating the Poor*. Introduction, Ch. 1

Bill of Rights in Action "Welfare" and "Welfare to Work" sections (course reserve)

The Economist. 2005. "Every Higher Society, Ever Harder to Ascend." January 1.

The New York Times. 2005. "In Tale of Two Families. A Chasm between the Haves and Have Nots" September 5.

Economic Policy Institute Website www.epinet.org (Peruse)

U.S. Census Bureau 2006. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the U.S.: 2005* (skim pages 1-28, skim tables)

Available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p60-231.pdf>

Special Topic: Homelessness (October 9)

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/>

Read *Fact Sheets* (listed under Publications on left side bar)

“Why are people homeless?” (Under **Basic Facts** heading)

“Homeless Families with Children” (Under **Populations** heading)

"Poverty or At Home in a Car" (<http://www.zmag.org/Zmag/articles/feb96spinks.htm>)

****Budget Project Due 10/14****

V. The “Working” Class (October 11, 16)

Ehrenrich, Barbara. 2002. *Nickel and Dime*d. Introduction, Ch 1, Evaluation

Conlin, Michelle and Aaron Bernstein. “Working And Poor.” *Newsweek*. May 31, 2004

Armour, Stephanie. “What Recovery? Working Poor Struggle to Pay Bills.” *USA Today*. June 9, 2004.

Hamper, Ben. 1991. *Rivthead*. Chapters 1 & 2

“Unions 101” (course reserve under AFL-CIO)

www.aflcio.org (peruse)

www.changetowin.org (peruse)

****Final Budget Project Due 10/18****

Movie: Waging a living (October 18)

VI. Gender & Inequality (October 23, 25)

Reskin, Barbara and Irene Padavic. 2002. *Women and Men at Work*. Chapters 2 & 6

www.eeoc.gov/types/sex/html (U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission website on Sex Based Discrimination)

Ackman, Dan. “Walmart and Sex Discrimination by the Numbers.” *Forbes Magazine*. June 23, 2004.

www.walmartclass.com (peruse)

****Midterm October 30****

VII. Race & Class Inequality (November 1, 6, 8)

McLeod, Jay. 2004. *Ain't No Makin It*. (Chapters to be announced)

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack."

Harden, Blaine. "City's Changing Face: Wealth, Race Guiding which New Orleans Stay and which Never Return." *The Washington Post*. 2006

Gans, Herbert J. 2005. "Race as Class." *Contexts* 4:17-21

DePalma, Anthony. 2005. "15 Years on the Bottom Rung." *The New York Times*. May 26.

VIII. Public Education & Inequality (November 13, 15, 20)

Laureau, Annette. *Unequal Childhoods*. Chapters to be announced

Ansalone, George. 2001. "Schooling, Tracking, and Inequality." *Journal of Children & Poverty* 7: 33-47.

****Paper 2 Due 11/15****

IX. Power & Class Inequality (November 27, 29 December 4)

Eckstein, Rick & Kevin J. Delaney. *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums*. Introduction, Chapters 1, 7 & 8

Mills, C. Wright. 1956. *The Power Elite*. Ch.1 "The Higher Circles."

****Paper 3 Due 12/4****

X. Do Classes Still Exist in the U.S.? (December 6)

Kingston, Paul W. 2000. *The Classless Society*. Chapters 2 & 12

Academic Integrity

I expect you to behave fairly, honestly, and with respect toward our collective educational goals. Violators of academic integrity risk. Please refer to the academic integrity policy in the Boston College Catalogue for any clarification. It is also available online at the following page:

http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/enmgt/stserv/acd/univ.html#integrity

Sociology 072 and the Core Curriculum

Sociology 072 is a part of the Core Curriculum in Sociology. As such it is designed to address a range of intellectual issues, using a variety of methodologies, and to engage students in particular ways. These are discussed below.

- a) The long-standing questions. Sociology and intellectual inquiry more generally, have long been preoccupied with a set of big questions. These include the debate over biological versus sociological causality, how cultures and societies evolve, the nature of human agency and its relation to social structures, what constitutes progress and what are the contemporary possibilities for realizing it. This course addresses these and other similar issues. For example, some authors argue that poverty is due to a lack of agency while others claim poverty is perpetuated through institutions like public education.
- b) Cultural diversity. This course also considers inequality from the point of view of cultural diversity, looking at how race and gender affect social class. These distinctions are absolutely central to the understanding of class inequality in U.S. society.
- c) Historical perspective. Throughout the course, a historical perspective is included. We will explore what policies and historical circumstances have contributed to social class structure in the contemporary U.S.
- d) Methodology. The authors we will read and the theories we will examine apply a wide range of methodological approaches and tools. By looking at a variety of points of view we can assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of various methods.
- e) Writing component. The course requires considerable reading and writing. In addition to a mid-term and a final examination which are mainly essay format, students will write three papers and complete a budget analysis project.
- f) Creating a personal philosophy. A major objective of this course is to get students to think critically and consciously about the class system and their place in it. Students will reflect on what perpetuates social stratification and how their actions may strengthen or lessen inequality.