

Instructor: Eve Spangler

Office: 400 McGuinn

Ext. 24146

Class Meeting: Tuesday, Thursday: 3:00 – 4:15 p.m.. McGuinn 121

Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday: 1:30 – 2:30 p.m,  
and by appointment.

In this course we will study class inequality in modern (mostly American) society. Because *Inequality in America* is a **core course**, we will consider the **perennial questions** of social justice and fairness that American citizens face. On the one hand, Americans strongly endorse an egalitarian rhetoric. On the other, inequalities of class, race, and gender are significant dimensions of our society. In this course students will be helped to develop a **personal analysis and philosophy** for thinking about and responding to persistent forms of inequality. The intellectual framework for this course stresses the consequences of *class* inequality - that is, the inequality that arises from the fact that some (few) people privately own the productive forces of our society (factories, businesses, media, etc.) while most others must sell their labor in order to survive. Within a *class* framework, the role of race, religion, ethnicity, and gender will also be considered - giving rise to an analysis that emphasizes the **culturally diverse** ways inequality is experienced and resisted.

The contents of this course are arranged as a survey. We will begin with a **historical perspective**, by reading a classical study of an American community in the 1920's: Robert and Helen Lynd's *Middletown*. Since the beginning of the industrial age, all of life in Muncie, Indiana (Middletown) has been divided absolutely between the business class and the working class, whose lives differ in every way: work, health, family, religion, leisure, schooling. *Middletown* allows us to ask: "How much has changed between 1923 and 2008?"

To answer this question, we will have to consider not only what sociologists know, but also how they go about doing research - i.e. we will raise the **methodological question**: How do we know what we know? *Middletown* represents one of the few studies in sociology in which the poor and the rich are seen in relationship to one another. This landmark study allows us to see how the lives of the rich and the poor intertwine and shape each other. For example, in *Middletown* the poor are poor because the rich design low wage jobs, withhold mortgage and home improvement monies, forbid their children to date on "the wrong side of the tracks," and preach the value of humility, piety and suffering to the poor. Similarly, the rich are rich because their workers, while poorly paid, are highly productive, and politically docile. Students will be urged to explore both the factual and ethical dimensions of patterns of inequality in class discussion and in their written assignments.

Following Middletown, we will turn our attention to each economic class in the community: the owners (Ostrander), highly paid professional and managerial employees (Cose/Collins/Oliver, Newman), traditional industrial workers (Rubin), and the unemployed (MacLeod). These readings constitute a systematic comparison of various classes in American society. They also demonstrate a variety of research strategies (participant observation, interviewing, etc.) that have been particularly fruitful throughout the field of sociology.

The questions to be asked about the owners are: Who are they? What percent of the population falls in this group? How do they maintain their privileged positions? About professionals and managers we will ask: In what direction does their future lie? Are they becoming more like owners or more like workers? Can they maintain themselves indefinitely as a privileged stratum between owners and other workers? About workers we will ask: How do they see their own experiences? What are the achievements and discontents of their lives? Why do they accept less than their fair share of America's great wealth? How do they try to improve their situation? Finally, we will want to find out whether the unemployed live in a distinctive "culture of poverty" that keeps them from participating on equal terms in society or whether some other explanation is possible for the persistence of poverty.

You will notice that this course is structured to survey the rich, professional groups, workers and the unemployed. Within these class categories, the readings raise issues of race and gender by considering most closely powerful women (instead of the more usual: powerful men), by studying professionals from communities of color rather than white professionals, and by studying impoverished whites in comparison to impoverished African Americans. Thus the readings address the simultaneity of class, race, and gender differences.

A schedule of assignment dates is attached below. Students will be **REQUIRED** to attend classes, to participate in class discussions and organized presentations, and to write eleven 3 - 5 page papers, half addressed to the assigned readings and half to mini-research exercises. **ABSOLUTELY NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR CREDIT UNLESS AN EXTENSION HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ME BEFORE THE DUE DATE OF THE ASSIGNMENT.** Please note that, with eleven papers, this is a **writing intensive** course. Assignment sheets will be distributed separately. Your final grade will be computed as follows:

11 essays @ 6% each	= 66%
class participation	= 25%
Final	= 9%

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is a standard of utmost importance in this class. Guidelines for academic integrity in written work are posted on the Boston College website at:

**[www.bc.edu/integrity](http://www.bc.edu/integrity)**

If you have any questions pertaining to the academic integrity guidelines, please come and talk with me or with the teaching assistant. If you are caught violating Boston College's policies on academic integrity, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment and the appropriate Dean will be notified in accordance to the rules set forth by Boston College.

Books to Purchase:

Robert and Helen Lynd *Middletown*  
Susan Ostrander *Women of the Upper Class*  
Katherine Newman *Falling from Grace*  
Lillian Rubin *Families on the Faultline*  
Jay MacLeod *Ain't No Makin It*

**ASSIGNED READINIG:**

I. Introduction: Classes in Relation to Each Other

**Readings:** Robert and Helen Lynd *Middletown.*: Introduction, Sections I - III. On on-line reserves.

**Assignments:** January 29: Lynd essay

II. The Power Elite: Policy and Accountability

**Readings:** Susan Ostrander *Women of the Upper Class*  
C.W. Mills, "The Structure of Power in American Society" (on-line)

**Assignments:** February 7: Ostrander/Mills Essay  
February 19: GROUP - Interlocking Directorates

III. Professionals in the Class Structure: Knowledge and Power:

**Readings:** On-Line Reserves on Race Relations (Cose; Collins; Oliver and Shapiro

Katherine Newman: *Falling from Grace*, Chaps 1 - 4

**Assignments:** February 28: Cose/Collins/Shapiro and Oliver Essay  
March 13: GROUP: Race at Boston College  
March 18: Newman Essay  
March 27: Budget Simulation: The High Cost of Being Middle Class

IV. The Working Class: Life on the Edge

**Readings:** Lillian Rubin *Families on the Faultline*

**Assignments:** April 3: Rubin Essay

April 10: Budget Simulation: Living at the Median Income

V. The Poor: Shut out of Work

**Readings:** Jay MacLeod *Ain't No Makin It*

**Assignments:**

April 17: MacLeod Essay

April 24: Budget Simulation: Living at the Poverty Line

VI. Conclusions

Finals Period: Synthesis: The American Class Structure.