

ASSIGNMENTS - INEQUALITY IN AMERICA

January 29

In *Middletown*, the Lynds point out that, over the 18 months of their study, one worker in 424 could be promoted. At the same time, workers and business people in *Middletown* accepted the standard that people are only as good as their career achievements (called "getting there" and "getting ahead"). Describe **five** ways that Middletown workers and their families cope with the contradiction between high achievement motivation and little real opportunity. Please be sure to document your answer with reference to the readings. Why did you choose these five strategies? From your own observations, how do they compare to coping strategies being used today?

February 5

How does the work of C. Wright Mills frame Ostrander's study of rich women? According to Ostrander, how do rich women contribute to the maintenance of inequality? Which aspects of their "work" do you think is the most important? (Put differently, what would change if wealthy women refused to behave as Ostrander's respondents do?) In your opinion, have Ostrander's women negotiated a good deal for themselves?

February 12

GROUP ASSIGNMENT: groups of 3-4 people

Within the context of studying the power elite, I want each group to look at the question: "who controls science?" This project involves several steps.

- Pick a public policy research (or research and advocacy) organization such as The Council on Foreign Relations, the Brookings Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Environmental Defense Fund, etc.
- Get a list of the Board of Directors of the organization you are studying.
- Compile a list of all the corporate boards (**for-profit corporations**, not just philanthropic or civic organizations) on which 3 of these directors serve.
- Evaluate the research produced by the "think tank." What topics do they address? What topics do they miss? Within their chosen field, how good are they at acknowledging "inconvenient facts" and contrary opinions?
- What relationship do you see between corporate sponsorship of research and the scientific knowledge produced, as reflected in the journals or other publications of this organization?

You may wish to use websites for most of this information, but bear in mind that *Who's Who* and *Who's Who in American Business* (both available at the library reference desk) are more useful sources for finding corporate affiliations.

Each group will be expected to give a five-minute report in class on their findings as well as submitting a group paper.

February 26

Two families, one white (the Smiths) and one African-American (the Thompsons) are similarly structured: i.e. with father in business (a contractor) and mother in the professions (teacher), two kids (aged 13 and 7), an assortment of elderly relatives, pets and household goods. Using ideas from Oliver and Shapiro, Cose, and Collins discuss the likely financial standing and social experiences of these two families from the grandparents' life to the grandchildren's prospects.

March 10-12

GROUP ASSIGNMENT

Using Peggy McIntosh's article as a model (WebCT), enumerate the ways that "whiteness," affluence, or heterosexuality is "normalized" at Boston College. List interventions that would challenge this normalization – be sure to focus on things students can do, without waiting for administrators and faculty to lead the change.

March 19

Using class discussions and the readings about professionals, construct a family budget to support your family when you are 30 years old. Include your own list of items necessary for life you want to live. Then, using newspapers and other sources (feel free to talk to our parents or older siblings or cousins), estimate the cost of this package. How much would family breadwinner(s) need to earn to live this life? Will the occupation you hope to have sustain this life style?

March 26

Lillian Rubin describes the political responses made by working class families (of varying races and ethnicities) to the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves. Please identify the major groups she describes and their coping strategies. What is missing? What should each group be asking for? What public policies would improve the lives of Rubin's respondents? How do Rubin's families compare to those of *Middletown*?

April 7

Reconstruct your budget (and life plans) to live at the national median income. How does your life differ from the life you planned in the previous budget? How do the **readings** help you to understand the tradeoffs you are making?

April 21

MacLeod distinguishes three levels at which social inequality operates: the structural, the cultural and the individual. Briefly describe this framework in your own words. Using this framework, explain why the hallway hangers and the brothers construct such different lives, although they live in the same environment. Remembering *Middletown*, how do the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers define success and what do they do to see themselves as successful? What do we learn from the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers about public policy to alleviate poverty?

April 28

Reconstruct your budget (and life plans) to live at the national poverty line (bear in mind that graduate students live considerably below the poverty line). How does your life differ from the life you have planned in previous budgets? What does this budget reveal to you about the life choices available to poor people? Please be sure to use the **readings**.

Finals Period Scheduled for this Class

Using the readings we have done this semester: (1) describe the American class structure - i.e. what is the basis for ranking people in a system of class inequality? How many classes does this ranking system produce? What are they? (2) identify the most salient issues for each class in securing a good life. (3) What does each class contribute to American society? How does each class burden American society? (4) if each class were to do better, what public policies should they call for? What private initiatives should they organize?

OR

Pick a social issue/problem related to inequality and of concern to you. Construct a plan for addressing this question. Be sure to include what you would want the government to do ("There ought to be a law..."), how you would use market/financial incentives to produce good results, what sort of educational program would be required, what you would want civil society organizations to contribute and what role, if any, dissent and grass roots militancy should play.