SC 038/BK 138 – Race, Class, and Gender: Social Identities, Inequality, and Power in the U.S. Fall 2009

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Office: McGuinn 509
Office Hours: M, W 11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m. and by appointment

Teaching Assistant: Alex Hernandez
Email:  Office:
Office Hours:

Classroom and Time: Carney Hall 102, M W F 2:00 p.m.

Sociologist Max Weber asserted that in order to comprehend inequality we must understand class, status, and party (i.e., power). These distinctions shape our social reality(ies?) and allocates material, psychological, and social resources unequally among different groups throughout the world. This course will examine how race, class, and gender inequality is perpetuated and how/why social identities are constructed within the context of the United States. As a Core course, we will do so by addressing the following issues:

**Perennial Questions:** This course will interrogate some of the on-going debates within sociology as well as the larger scholarship on race, class, and gender. For instance, we will ask: What drives human behavior, biology or culture? Do people shape society or does society shape people? What is “freedom”? What are the limits of our ability to overcome oppression and inequality? What is the meaning of progress?

To help tackle these questions, this course will be explicitly guided by four central themes from critical race feminism (CRF). This perspective asserts that:

1) Social identities are historically and culturally specific and change over time.
2) Race, class, gender, and sexuality are not separate identities that are easily distinguishable from one another. These social identities intersect and reinforce each other. For example, one cannot talk about race without examining its implications for gender and vice versa.
3) CRF acknowledges the importance of laws, policies, and institutions in the perpetuation of inequalities.
4) Finally, CRF is skeptical of concepts such as objectivity, neutrality, and meritocracy. Therefore, ideas of equality must be critically examined.

**Cultural Diversity:** Cultural diversity is at the heart of this course. We will discuss a range of racial and ethnic groups and their relationships to power. For example, we will see that Native Americans and African-Americans have vastly dissimilar relationships to racism. However, we will not only look at distinctions between groups, but also within group variation. Black women and Black men, for example can experience racism very differently.

**Historical Perspective:** In the first assigned reading sociologist C. Wright Mills outlines the “sociological imagination,” which highlights the connections between history, social structure, and personal biography. This course nurtures the sociological imagination through its socio-historical foundation, its emphasis on multiple perspectives, and an examination of how history and social structure converge to impinge on the life chances of different types of people.
We begin by discussing the socio-historical construction of race, class, gender, and sexuality and how they are connected. We will then look at how these social identities shape—and are also shaped by—four general subject areas: (1) wealth and poverty, (2) education, (3) families, children, and youth and (4) crime, law, and social policy. Although this course is separated into subject areas, we shall see that these areas greatly overlap and are mutually influenced by one other.

**Methodology:** Methodologies are the procedures that are used to guide research. The course materials are purposely eclectic and draw from a wide range of sources and methods. We will utilize the work of both “positivist” scholars who often obtain data from social surveys and controlled experiments as well as more “interpretative” researchers who frequently derive data from fieldwork and interviewing. We will also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of particular methodologies.

**Writing Component:** Throughout the semester you will be compelled to use your “sociological imagination” in essays for exams, in-class writing, and, if you choose, extra-credit assignments. The writing component will help you develop critical thinking skills and to engage the world sociologically.

**Creating A Personal Philosophy:** This course will challenge you to critically examine: yourself in the social order; how you benefit from and/or are oppressed by your social location; your ideas of freedom and social justice; your vision for yourself and society in the future; and the best ways to realize that vision considering the very real social constraints that bind us all. Hopefully, this will encourage working for the betterment of human kind from a culturally competent standpoint that is informed by the complex intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

**Course Expectations and Evaluation:**
1) This is a reading and participation intensive course. Readings are due on the date they are listed. Come to class ready to discuss them.

2) If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate.

3) There will be three exams. Exam One is worth 20%, Exam Two is 30%, and the Last Exam accounts for 35% of your final grade.

4) Fifteen percent of the final grade will consist of class participation. This includes contributing to class discussions, in-class writing assignments, and pop quizzes. Class disruptions and tardiness will have a negative impact on your class participation. **Do not** come to class if you are more than five minutes late unless you have permission from the professor. After the class has been in session for five minutes the door will be shut. **Do not enter if the door is closed.** You cannot make up in-class assignments or pop-quizzes if you are not present unless you have an excused absence.

5) A doctor, school administrator, or other certified official must verify an absence in order for it to be excused. Notes from parents or legal guardians will not be accepted.

6) Students will also be given the option to write up to five response statements for extra credit. These statements should be in response to readings. You should take the time to craft a
thoughtful critique because there is no guarantee that you will receive credit. In order to get credit, statements will be evaluated based on the following criteria: (a) an introduction that distinctly states your topic and why it is important; (b) responses should have a logical flow with supporting evidence from the readings and lecture; (c) a succinct critique of the pertinent issues; (d) and all papers should be typed, double spaced, and NO MORE than two pages. Once we have finished discussing a particular reading, you cannot write a statement on it. Also, statements must be on different subject areas. For example, you cannot write two statements on education. These statements may also be read allowed to the class to spark discussion (names, however, will be kept confidential). Each response statement is worth a one-percentage point increase to your final grade. For example, if you do (and receive credit for) all five statements a grade of 85% will be bumped up to a 90%. There will be no other extra credit options.

Grading Scale:

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<td>90-93</td>
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<td>86-89</td>
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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

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.

Required Readings:


Ereserve Readings: To access e-reserve readings (a) go to the libraries home page; (b) click on “more catalog search options;” (c) click on “Course/On-line Reserves;” and (d) Search by my last name, McGuffey.

The professor reserves the right to incorporate additional readings throughout the course.
Reading Schedule:

*Constructing Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Class*

**Sept. 9:** First Day of Class – No Readings


AND


AND


AND


**Sept. 30:** FIRST EXAM!!!
Wealth and Poverty


AND


AND


Oct. 12: NO CLASS – Enjoy Your Break!


AND


Education


AND

**Oct. 30: SECOND EXAM!!!**

**Families, Children and Youth**


**Nov. 4:** Jones, Ann. *Next Time She’ll be Dead*, Ch.5 “Why Doesn’t She Leave?”, Beacon Press.


**Nov 9:** Stacey, Judith. 1996. *In the Name of the Family*, Ch. 5 “Gay and Lesbian Families Are Here; All Our Families Are Queer; Let’s Get Used to It!” pp. 105-144. Boston: Beacon Press.

**Nov. 11:** J. Wright. 2001. “‘Aside from One Little, Tiny Detail, We Are So Incredibly Normal:’ Perspectives of Children in Lesbian Step Families.” In M. Berstein and R. Reimann (eds), *Queer Families, Queer Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.


**Nov. 16:** Yen Le Espiritu. 2001. “‘We Don’t Sleep Around Like White Girls Do’: Family, Culture, and Gender in Filipina American Lives,” *Signs* v.26(2), pp. 415-440.

**Nov. 18:** Amy C. Wilkins. “Puerto Rican Wannabees: Sexual Spectacle and the Marking of Race, Class, and Gender Boundaries,” *Gender & Society* v.18(1), pp. 103-121.

**Crime, Law, and Social Policy**


**Nov. 25 – 27: NO CLASS!!! Have a Great Break!!!**


**AND**


**AND**

6


Dec. 9: Wrap up and Review – No Readings (Last day of regularly scheduled class)

LAST EXAM will be given during finals week (TBA)