

University of Maryland

SOCY 241 - 0101
Inequality in American Society
Fall 2007
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Syllabus

Americans are firmly committed to the notion that people are shaped mainly by their individual actions. Indeed this is the essence of the American ideology.
Sociology, however, compels us to look not simply at how individuals act but at the social forces that shape their actions.

- Martin N. Marger

I. Purpose

The purpose of this course, as the title indicates, is to study and explain the nature of social inequality as it relates to American society. Although inequality has many dimensions, economic, political, racial, gender and socio-cultural, this course's emphasis will be on economic (class) inequality with a special focus on poverty. This stems from the fact that while other forms of inequality, such as racial, or gender have been embraced and comprehended more easily, the idea of class inequality "remains mired in prejudice and mythology" (Barbara Ehrenreich, 1989). Thus, we will deal with issues such as how social scientists theorize inequality, study various forms and structures of inequality in the U.S., analyze social movements that resist it, and, finally the role of public policy and the dominant ideology in maintaining or reducing inequality. We will also answer some questions regarding contemporary society such as: why is economic inequality getting more extreme? Who benefits and who suffers from this trend? What are the roles of the state and the "power elite" in all this? What is the role of educational system and the media. Usually, this course is highly challenging to many students, in so far as it questions many long-held individualistic and psychological beliefs – ideologies held by the public. Hopefully, in the end, you will all be more informed because you will be able to consider structural as well as individual level explanations of social inequality. All in all, human performance is a product of both societal forces as well as individual characteristics.

In addition to economic/occupational aspects of class inequality in the U.S., we will also briefly examine the impact of globalization on economic inequality and the nature of work, both on a domestic as well as international scale.

II. Grading

Your final grades will be based on two equal exams, each covering half of the course material (80%). Further, all students are expected to complete a research project related to the subject of social inequality (minimum 8 pages long) [20%] The outlines are due on **Apr. 23** (Look at the appendix). The papers are due **May 19**.

Regular attendance and active class participation will also contribute to the final grade (+3 to -3).. (Students who miss more than 10 unexcused classes will lose 5 Points).

III. Course Format

This course is primarily based on lectures. However, alternative modes of teaching including group discussions, films, guest lecturers, and student presentations will supplement the instructor's lecturing. Regular attendance and participation are strongly recommended.

Further, to make the class more dynamic and productive we suggest:

1. Do not miss classes. Students are only allowed four unexcused absences. Missing additional classes **will have an adverse effect on your final grade.**
2. Read the assignments **before** coming to class and participate in class discussions. You are expected to be familiar with class assignments. Questions will be regularly asked. Your grade will be affected by your class performance. Students who do not intend to participate in class discussions can arrange with me to write a short paper as a makeup in the very beginning of the term.
3. Take comprehensive notes. Part of the exam questions are based on my lectures.
4. Do not hesitate to ask your questions or express your opinions about different aspects of the course. My office is always open to you (based on appointment).
5. Do not miss any scheduled examinations; the alternative could be an **oral** examination. Preferably, the instructor needs to be informed about your absence **in advance**. However, you can only exercise this option **once**. Please call my office or e-mail me in such cases. In the case of missing an examination, students are expected to provide me with the relevant documents.

IV. Textbooks

1. Harold Kerbo, Social Stratification and Inequality. McGraw-Hill, 2007 [K]
2. Richard Sennett, The Corrosion of Character. Norton, 1998 [R/S].
3. Jay MacLeod, Ain't No Makin' it. Westview Press, 1995. [M]
4. David Shipler, Working Poor, Knopf, 2005 [S]
5. Articles and handouts will be occasionally provided by the instructor

V. Readings and Assignments

Jan. 28	Introduction to the Course
Jan. 30	Major Concepts K: Ch. 1
Feb. 1	Dimensions of Inequality in the U.S. K: Ch. 2
Feb. 4, 8	The History of Inequality K: Ch. 3
Feb. 6	Film (Roger & Me) – Part I Hornbake Library, Ground Floor
Feb. 11, 13	Classical Theories - Marx K: Ch. 4 (Pp. 79-95)
Feb. 15	Classical Theories-Weber & Durkheim K: ch. 4 (Pp, 95-108)
Feb. 18	Modern Theories K: Ch. 5 (Pp. 111-125), (125-135, 141-142)
Feb. 20	Film
Feb. 22	The Upper Class K: Ch. 6
Feb. 25	The Corporate Class K: Ch. 7
Feb. 27, 29	The Middle & the Working Classes K: Ch. 8
Mar. 3, 5	Poverty and the Poor K: Ch. 9 S: Introduction
Mar. 7	Social Mobility K: Pp. 367-379 & 400-410
Mar. 10	Education and Inequality K: Pp. 404-408 M: Ch. 1
March 12	Film

Mar. 14	<u>Mid-term</u>
Mar. 24	Working Poor S: Chs. 1, 2, 3
Mar. 26	Working Poor S: Chs. 4, 7, 8
Mar. 31	Working Poor S: Chs. 9 – R/S: Preface, ch. 1
Apr. 2	The Corrosion of Character Chs. 2, 3
Apr. 4	The Corrosion of Character Chs. 4, 5
Apr. 7	Film
Apr. 9	The Corrosion of Character Chs. 7, 8
Apr. 11	Ain't No Makin' It M: Ch. 2
Apr. 14	Ain't No Makin' It M: Chs. 3, 4
Apr. 16	Film
Apr. 18	Ain't No Makin' It M: Chs. 5, 6
Apr. 21	Ain't No Makin' It M: Chs. 7, 10
Apr. 23	M/ch. 11 & <u>Paper Outlines Due</u>
Apr. 25, 28	The Process of Legitimation K: Ch. 13
Apr. 30, May 2	Globalization & Global Inequality K: Ch. 14
May 5, 9	World Stratification & Globalization K: ch. 17 (Pp.)
May 7	Film

May 12

EXAM II

May 19

Research Papers Due (12:00 pm) - only hard copies are accepted.

VI. Appendix on Final Paper

The purpose of writing a research paper is to apply your sociological knowledge to specific social issues related to class and global inequality. Your emphasis should be analytical rather than descriptive. To perform this project the following steps are suggested:

1. Choose a general sociological topic that is of interest to you. It may apply to any issue you are most familiar with (related to class/global inequality).
2. Narrow it down to a specific sociological question/hypothesis. Avoid broad issues/questions.
3. Find a minimum of eight sociological/social-scientific sources. At least half of your sources need to be sociological books. The other half could be sociological articles from sociology/social-scientific journals. You are only allowed one article from popular periodicals/magazines (N.Y. Times, Newsweek, Washington Post, etc.) or the internet sources. Try to use only the sources from the post-1980s period. These sources need to be read and cited in your paper.
4. Make sure your paper is as analytical as possible. In other words try to answer/explain a major question. Avoid descriptive writing (i.e., only providing basic information). In other words, you are expected to answer “why” certain issues/behaviors do occur the way they do.
5. Your paper needs to be segmented into sections and subsections. You can do this by separating each section with a new title/subtitle. Look at each chapter of our text book as a guideline.
6. Your final paper should be at least 8 pages long (excluding the cover sheet, bibliography, and end notes) and double-spaced. Make sure your bibliography provides me with full information: author’s full name, name of the book/article, publisher, date of publication, etc.
7. Submit the paper (hard copy) on or before **May 19** in my office or in my department mailbox.
8. For more information and consultation, contact me during my office hours.
9. Your research abstract/outline is due **April 23**, it should include the following information:
 - a. Your specific and brief title on the top.
 - b. A brief summary of what you intend to do in the paper (fairly specific).
 - c. At least 6 sociological sources (complete information). They will be reviewed and

returned to you.

The reviewed outline has to be attached to your final paper when you submit it. Otherwise, you lose **3** points.

10. No topic changes allowed after **April 30** (you lose 10 points)
11. The preferred type of text reference is the parenthetical (Wilson 1998:19-26)

VII. OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES

Diversity Course

You may have chosen this course as part of your cultural DIVERSITY program. Cultural diversity courses focus DIVERSITY program. Cultural diversity courses focus on various issues related to minority groups, subcultures and/or non-Western cultures and societies.

Academic Integrity Expectations

Students and instructors in this course are both responsible for upholding academic integrity and are expected to adhere to the University Honor Code. Violation such as cheating, plagiarism, forged reported to the Student Honor Council and the Office of Judicial Programs. For more information on such violations, reporting procedures, and attached penalties, students are strongly encouraged to review the relevant sections in the “Schedule of Classes.”

Students With Disabilities

If you have a documented physical or learning disability, necessary accommodations will be made. A written request should be made one week prior to each exam for which accommodation is appropriate. University of Maryland documentation of disability needs to be obtained from Disability Support Services (301-314-7682).

Religious Observance Holidays

Students with religious holidays that conflict with the course calendar should inform their instructor of those dates by e-mail within the first week of the semester.

