

# INEQUALITY IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

**Sociology 241**  
**Fall 2008**

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## **BASIC INFORMATION**

**Instructor:** Carolina Martin

**Class:** MWF 12-12:50pm, Art-Sociology Bdg. 3207

**Office:** 3108 Art-Sociology Bdg.

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays and Fridays 1:00-2:00pm, or by appointment

**Email:** cmartin@socy.umd.edu (this is the best way to contact me)

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course uses a sociological perspective to analyze stratification and systems of inequality in American society. Of central concern is the way categories of difference are socially constructed and transformed into enduring structures of inequality. We will focus primarily on three axes of inequality in the U.S.: social/economic class, race, and gender/sex. We will come to understand how and why such categories of differences are constructed, how these categories affect the distribution of resources and otherwise impact members of U.S. society, the way institutions and other elements of social structure work to reinforce and maintain these systems of stratification, and how people have worked to try to alleviate and/or transform systems of inequality.

Toward these ends, the course will be separated into three parts:

### **PART I: CATEGORIES OF DIFFERENCES AND INEQUALITY**

Objectives:

- To understand dominant Sociological theory approaches to the study of inequality.
- To understand how and why certain important categories of difference are constructed (focusing on race, class, gender), and how the meanings and values attributed to these categories cause inequality in our society.
- To explore how resources are differentially distributed across these categories, and how members of society experience difference and inequality in everyday life.

### **PART II: MAINTAINING AND PERPETUATING INEQUALITIES**

Objectives:

- To understand how social institutions and ideologies construct and perpetuate categories of difference and systems of inequality.

### PART III: RESISTANCE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Objectives:

- To understand the various methods and strategies utilized by members of society to try to reduce or abolish inequalities.
  - To develop an understanding of the barriers created by social institutions and ideologies in bringing about social change.
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### **REQUIRED TEXT AND READINGS**

#### **Required Text**

Ore, Tracy E. 2009. *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality: race, class, gender, and sexuality*. 4th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

#### **Additional Readings**

You will be provided with additional readings throughout the course via the **Blackboard** website (<http://www.elms.umd.edu>) and occasional e-mails. (You will need to log into this website, and then subscribe to this class: SOC-241.) PLEASE check your email and/or Blackboard regularly. This is not a request but a requirement of the course. You are responsible for materials sent via email as well as those posted on the course website.

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### **GRADING AND COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

#### **Grading**

The grading scale for exams and your final grade is as follows:

A = 90 – 100%; B+ = 87-89%; B = 80-86%; C+ = 77-79; C = 70-75; D = 60-69; F = below 60

1. **40%** Papers (3) (10% each, plus 10% for *optional* final paper)
2. **40%** Exams (2) (15% for the midterm, and 25% for the final)
3. **20%** Class Participation

I do not negotiate final grades and I will not assign any extra credit work. You are expected to keep up with the readings and to perform to the best of your ability on all the required assignments. Please see me about your progress during the semester if you are concerned, not after the class is over.

#### **Papers (40%)**

You will be required to write a paper in which you will critically analyze a specific category of inequality of your own choosing. You may choose to rely only on course readings and discuss race, class, or gender; or for those of you wanting a challenge,

choose a different category-- examples of possible topics are religion, sexuality, age, disability, or nationality. This paper will be written in three parts over the course of the semester, with each paper corresponding to one of the three parts of the course (and each worth 10% of your grade). In other words, each of these short papers (3-6 pages each) will cover the same topic and build off of one another. At the end of the semester, you have the *option* of handing in a final paper merging the three short papers you have written over the course of the semester with any changes or corrections. This final paper is optional. If you are happy with the average grades you have received on the three parts, you need not hand in the final paper. If you do not hand in the final paper, the additional 10% will be an average of the grades you received on the three short papers.

These papers should demonstrate clarity of writing, synthesis, and critical thinking, rather than a large number of sources, quotations, and/or verbosity. *Papers may not be handed in electronically; I must receive a hard copy of your paper by 12:50pm (end of class) on the due date.*

- Part 1 (10%): due Monday, October 6
- Part 2 (10%): due Friday, November 14
- Part 3 (10%): due Monday, December 8
- (Optional) Final Paper (10%): due Friday, December 12

### **Exams (40%)**

There will be two cumulative exams, which together will account for 40% of your final grade. These exams will be in class, composed primarily of short answer questions, and open book. There will be in-class review sessions prior to each exam.

- Midterm Exam (15%): Monday, October 13, 2008.
- Final Exam (25%): December 19, 2008. 8am-10am

### **Class Participation/ Homework assignments (20%)**

You are expected to keep up with readings and to participate in class discussions and activities when appropriate. Periodically, you might be asked to answer a short homework question on the readings; these assignments will be announced in class and on Blackboard. In class, I may also give periodic quizzes or assignments—these cannot be made up, so if you are not present, you will not get credit.

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## **OTHER CLASS EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES**

### **Attendance**

I do not take attendance, and I am not interested in policing absenteeism. However, it seems common-sensical that you will struggle more to meet course requirements if you do not show up to lectures. At the very least, your class participation grade will suffer if you do not attend. I expect you to keep up with assignments and readings, and to try your best. If you come to me towards the end of the semester complaining

about how you are doing in the class, it is harder for me to sympathize if I have not seen you in class regularly.

If you participate in a sport or any other extracurricular activity that might present a conflict with a scheduled class assignment, you are required to provide me with a written explanation of absence. Student athletes must furnish an “away” game schedule.

### **Paper Deadlines**

Deadlines are deadlines; you have been given the due dates well in advance, and so, in choosing to stay in this class, you are agreeing to follow said deadlines. Conflicts due to work or vacations will not be excused. However, I understand that life happens and unexpected situations occur. Extensions on papers will be considered if I am notified in advance of due dates (i.e. not the day it’s due). Without an extension, I will accept papers up to two days late, at a 25% grade penalty (which means that the highest possible grade you will be able to earn for that paper would be a C). After 48 hours past the due date, **NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED** (no grade for that assignment).

### **Missed Exams, Religious Holidays, Inclement Weather**

To make up a missed exam, you must provide me with a signed doctor’s note or some other written – and official – form of explanation for the absence. Religious holidays are respected and all reasonable attempts will be made to accommodate the faiths and beliefs of all persons. However, I should be notified of conflicts due to religious commitments in advance. From time to time the University will close due to inclement weather. In this event, we will adjust the class schedule accordingly, and these changes will be announced in class and/or on Blackboard.

### **Disability Accommodations**

If you need any specific accommodation due to a disability, please see me as soon as possible so that we may make appropriate arrangements. In order to receive accommodations students need to be registered with Disabled Student Services on campus. Information regarding any disability will be treated as confidential.

### **Classroom Behavior**

Given that topics such as discrimination can be difficult, I expect mature and sensitive behavior and commentary at all times. I have zero tolerance for disruptive and inappropriate (racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.) behavior and/or language. The classroom is a tolerant environment within which we will engage in an open and thoughtful discussion.

No cell phones—no ringing, no talking, no texting. It’s rude. PLEASE turn off your cell phones or mute them prior to entering the classroom. Also, no reading the newspaper, chit-chatting in the back of the class, surfing the web, or online chatting. That’s rude too. If you are not interested in paying attention and participating in class, by all

means, don't come (but note the consequences as explained in the attendance and class participation sections).

### **Plagiarism – DON'T DO IT!**

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit <http://www.shc.umd.edu>.

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### **TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE**

**[T] = your textbook (*The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality* by Tracy Ore)**

**[BB] = available on Blackboard**

\*\*\* I reserve the right to alter assigned readings. There is good reason to believe that we will make many alterations to the following schedule as the semester progresses and we choose to linger in certain places and overlook others. Changes to the reading schedule will be announced in class and on Blackboard at least one class in advance. It is your responsibility to check Blackboard / email and to be aware of any announcements made in class. \*\*\*

#### **PART I: CATEGORIES OF DIFFERENCES AND INEQUALITY**

#### **Week 1: Introduction to the course**

Wed. Sept 3: Overview of course

Fri. Sept 5: Opportunity and Inequality in the United States

- Mills, C. Wright. "The Promise" from *The Sociological Imagination* (12pgs) [BB]
- Reuss, Alejandro. *Cause of Death: Inequality* (p. 387-391) [T]

#### **Week 2: Inequality through a sociological lens/ Theories of inequality**

Mon. Sept 8: Intro to the Sociological study of inequality/ Structural thinking

- Fischer et al., "Why Inequality?" from *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve*. (7pgs) [BB]
- Rushton, J. Philippe. "Race, Intelligence, and the Brain: The Errors and Omissions of the 'Revised' Edition of S.J. Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* (1996)." *Personality and Individual Differences* 23:169-80.

Wed. Sept 10: Conflict theories

- Marx, Karl and F. Engels, excerpt from *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. (8 pgs) **[BB]**
- Weber, Max. "Class, Status, Party" (11pgs) **[BB]**
- Mills, C. Wright. Excerpt from *The Power Elite*. (11pgs) **[BB]**

Fri. Sept 12: Social Construction Theory

- Ore, *Constructing Differences*. (p. 1-17) **[T]**
- Wildman and Davis, *Making Systems of Privilege Visible*. (p.615-621) **[T]**

### **Week 3: Categories of difference- race/ethnicity**

Mon. Sept 15: The creation of race and ethnicity

- Omi and Winant. *Racial Formations*. (p. 19-29) **[T]**
- Waters, Mary C. *Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?* (p.29-42) **[T]**
- Brodtkin, Karen. *How did Jews Become White Folks?* (p.56-75) **[T]**

Wed. Sept 17: Race and ethnicity, continued

- Nguyen, Tram. *Becoming Suspects*. (p. 42-55) **[T]**
- Coffer, Judith Ortiz. *The Story of my Body* (p. 640-648) **[T]**

Fri. Sept 19: Race and class

- Oliver and Shapiro, *Race, Wealth, and Equality*. (p. 75-87) **[T]**
- Lui, Meizhu. *Doubly Divided: The Racial Wealth Gap* (p. 97-103) **[T]**

### **Week 4: Categories of difference- social class**

Mon. Sept 22: The invisibility of class in the US

- Zinn, Howard. "The Forbidden Word: Class" in *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress*. (7pgs) **[BB]**
- Matsios, Gregory. *Media Magic: Making Class Invisible* (p. 88-96) **[T]**

Wed. Sept 24: The rich and the poor

- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel-and-Dimed On (Not) Getting by in America* (p.681-695) **[T]**
- Downey, Annie. *I Am Your Welfare Reform* (p. 695-697) **[T]**
- Shields, Janice. *Getting Corporations off the Public Dole* (p. 104-111) **[T]**
- Domhoff, William G. *The American Upper Class*. (7 pgs) **[BB]**

Fri. Sept 26: Class and culture

- Bourdieu. Excerpt from *Distinction*. **[BB]**

### **Week 5: Gender/Sex**

Mon. Sept 29: The Social Construction of Gender

- Lorber, Judith. *The Social Construction of Gender*. (p. 111-119) **[T]**
- Kimmel, Michael. *Masculinity as Homophobia*. (p.132-149). **[T]**

Wed. Oct 1: Gender and Inequality

- Thorne and Luria. *Sexuality and Gender in Children's Daily Worlds*. (p.163-183) **[T]**
- Risman, Barbara J. *Gender as Structure*. (7 pgs) **[BB]**

Fri. Oct 3: Conclude Part I

- Work on your paper. Bring questions to class.

## PART II: MAINTAINING AND PERPETUATING INEQUALITIES

### **Week 6: Intro / Ideology**

Mon. Oct 6: Introduction to Part II

- Ore, Tracy E. *Maintaining Inequalities: Systems of Oppression and Privilege*.(p. 213-237) **[T]**
- **PAPER #1 DUE**

Wed. Oct 8: Ideology and Language

- Moore, Robert B. *Racism in the English Language* (p. 524-534) **[T]**
- Pharr, Suzanne. *Homophobia as a Weapon of Sexism* (p. 601-610) **[T]**
- Wildman and Davis. *Making Systems of Privilege Visible*. (p. 615-621) **[T]**

Fri. Oct 10: Midterm Review

### **Week 7: Media**

Mon. Oct 13: **MIDTERM EXAM**

Wed. Oct 15: The media/ news/ newsmakers

- Chomsky, Noam. *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*. **[BB]**
- Dye and Ziegler. "Elite-Mass Communication" in *The Irony of Democracy*. **[BB]**

Fri. Oct 17: Sitcoms and tv shows

- Butsch, Richard. *Five Decades and Three Hundred Sitcoms about Class and Gender*. (p. 444-462) **[T]**
- Lichter and Amundson. *Distorted Reality: Hispanic Characters in TV Entertainment*. (p. 463-477) **[T]**
- Battles and Hilton-Marrow. *Gay Characters in Conventional Spaces: Will and Grace and the Situation Comedy Genre*. (p. 477-497) **[T]**

### **Week 8: The Family and The State**

Mon. Oct 20: The Family

- Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Weren't: The Myth and Reality of the 'Traditional' Family* (8pgs) **[BB]**
- Stacey, Judith. *Gay and Lesbian Families are Here* (p. 292-304) **[T]**
- Dill, Bonnie Thornton. *Our Mothers' Grief: Racial-Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families* (p. 239-259) **[T]**

Wed. Oct 22: Public Policy

- Burnham, Linda. *Welfare Reform, Family Hardship, and Women of Color* (392-402) [T]
- Massey and Denton. *The Continuing Causes of Segregation*. [BB]
- Reskin, Barbara. *The Effects of Affirmative Action on Other Stakeholders* (p. 419-431) [T]

Fri. Oct 24: Prisons

- Western and Pettit. *Beyond Crime and Punishment: Prisons and Inequality* (p. 403-410) [T]
- Cole, David. *No Equal Justice: Race and Class in the American Criminal Justice System* (p. 410-419) [T]
- Reiman, Jeffrey. *...And the Poor get Prison* (22pgs.) [BB]

### **Week 9: Education and Work**

Mon. Oct 27: Inequalities in Education

- Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. (p. 305-312) [T]
- Cookson, Peter W. and Persell, Caroline Hodges. *Preparing for Power: Cultural Capital and Curricula in America's Elite Boarding Schools*. (p.312-323) [T]
- Ogbu, John U. *Racial Stratification and Education in the United States: Why Inequality Persists*. [BB]

Wed. Oct 29: More inequalities perpetuated through Education

- Dog and Erdoes. *Civilize Them with a Stick*. (p. 323-330) [T]
- Sadker and Sadker. *Missing in Interaction*. (p. 331-343) [T]
- Miceli. *Schools and the Social Control of Sexuality*. (p. 344-354) [T]

Fri. Oct 31: Work

- Kirschenman and Neckerman. *"We'd Love to Hire Them, But...": The Meaning of Race for Employers*. (p. 365-375) [T]
- Williams, Christine L. *The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions*. (p. 375-386) [T]

### **Week 10: Economy, Globalization, Capitalism, Corporations**

Mon. Nov 3: Economy and Globalization

- Wilson, William J. *Jobless Ghettos: The Social Implications of the Disappearance of Work in Segregated Neighborhoods*. (p. 354-364) [T]
- Barnet and Cavanagh. *Mass Production in Postmodern Times*. (9 pgs) [BB]

Wed. Nov 5: Globalization and Immigration

- Laws, Glenda. *Globalization, Immigration, and Changing Social Relations* [BB]
- Massey et al. *New Migrations, New Theories* [BB]

Fri. Nov 7: Corporations and Big Business

- Excerpt from *No Logo* [BB]
- Mills, C. Wright. *The Structure of Power in American Society* [BB]

## **Week 11: Politics, Democracy and Elites**

Mon. Nov 10: Politics, Democracy and Elites

- Dye and Zeigler. Excerpt(s) from *The Irony of Democracy* [BB]
- Zinn, Howard. “The Ludlow Massacre” in *Zinn Reader*. [BB]
- Tilly, Charles. “The Politics of Inequality” in *Durable Inequality*. [BB]

Wed. Nov 12: Conclude Part II

Fri. Nov 14: Film- *You can't be neutral on a moving train*

- **PAPER #2 DUE**

## **PART III: RESISTANCE AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

## **Week 12: Creating Change... Agency**

Mon. Nov 17: Intro to Part III

- Ore, Tracy E. *Resistance and Social Change*. (p.708-719) [T]
- Chomsky, Noam. “Equality” in *The Chomsky Reader* (20 pgs) [BB]

Wed. Nov 19: Institutional barriers

- Killian, Lewis M. *Race Relations and the Nineties: Where are the Dreams of the Sixties?* [BB]
- Lorber, Judith. *Dismantling Noah's Ark*. (p. 768-781) [T]
- Dye and Ziegler. “Elite Responses to Mass Protest” in *The Irony of Democracy*. [BB]

Fri. Nov 21: Ideological barriers (the American Dream, Color blindness, etc.)

- Dye and Ziegler. “Masses in America” in *The Irony of Democracy*. [BB]
- Readings TBA (crt?)

## **Week 13: Social Movements**

Mon. Nov 24: Social Movements

- Freeman, Jo. *On the Origins of Social Movements*. [BB]
- Davies, James C. *Toward a Theory of Revolution*. [BB]
- Reading TBA (on “anti-globalization” movement). [BB]

Wed. Nov 26: Coalitions

- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection*. (p. 720-734) [T]
- Kivel, Paul. *How White People Can Serve as Allies to People of Color in the Struggle to End Racism* (p. 759-767) [T]
- Martinez, Elizabeth. *Seeing More Than Black and White: Latinos, Racism, and the Cultural Divides*. (p. 752-759) [T]

Fri. Nov 28: **NO CLASS**

**Week 14: Cultural resistance and Everyday resistance**

Mon. Dec 1: Cultural resistance

- Espiritu, Yen Le. *Cultural Resistance: Reconstructing Our Own Images* (p. 735-744) **[T]**
- Imani Perry. Excerpt from *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*. **[BB]**

Wed. Dec 3: Everyday resistance

- Scott, James. Excerpt from *Everyday Resistance* **[BB]**
- Zinn, Howard. "Anarchism" in *Zinn Reader*. **[BB]**

Fri. Dec 5: Utopian communities

- Reading TBA (Zapatistas)
- Reading TBA (Communes, barter economies, freedom schools, etc.)

**Week 15**

Mon. Dec 8: Film

- **PAPER #3 DUE**

Wed. Dec 10: Exam Review

Fri. Dec 12: Exam Review. **LAST DAY OF CLASSES.**

- **OPTIONAL FINAL PAPER DUE**

**Week 16**

**NO CLASSES**

Fri. Dec 19- **FINAL EXAM AT 8AM**