

SOCIOLOGY 24: Introduction to Social Inequality

Harvard University

Spring 2017

Tuesday and Thursday 10:00-11:00am William James Hall B1

<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/21801>

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Overview

Welcome to Introduction to Social Inequality! In this course, we will seek to answer two questions about the distribution of resources in our society: who gets what, and why? The course is organized into three units that represent core elements of social position: social class, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender. In each unit, we will study the ways in which socio-economic resources are distributed and explore the social processes, structures, and institutions that influence the distribution of these resources. The course materials are organized around a selection of books that have defined contemporary research on social inequality.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- 1) Understand descriptive patterns of how socio-economic resources are distributed by social class, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender.
- 2) Synthesize sociological research on the social processes, structures, and institutions that influence the distribution of socio-economic resources
- 3) Apply theories of social inequality to contemporary events and debates

Course Books

Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life, by Annette Lareau. California, 2003.

Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth, by Claude Fischer et al. Princeton, 1996.

American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass, by Douglas S. Massey and Nancy Denton. Harvard, University Press 1993.

When Work Disappears, by William Julius Wilson. Vintage Books, 1996.

Black Wealth / White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality, by Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro. Routledge, 1997.

The Second Shift, by Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung. Penguin, reissue ed., 2003.

Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home, by Pamela Stone. University of California Press, 2007

Responsibilities and Requirements

In service of the course objectives, you are asked to:

- 1) Attend class.
- 2) Complete the assigned readings.
- 3) Attend and participate in weekly sections.
- 4) Write 3 short papers.
- 5) Complete a final project.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- 10% – Class attendance
- 15% – Section attendance and participation (including submission of discussion questions)
- 10% – Paper 1
- 15% – Paper 2
- 15% – Paper 3
- 35% – Final Project

Course Policies

Attendance: Students are required to attend each class session (starting in Week 2 of the course). Attending class ensures that you will benefit from all course material and provides opportunities to exchange ideas and learn from fellow students.

Attendance will be taken at every class and section, and absences will only be excused for medical reasons or for religious observance. In these cases, you must email your TF in advance (unless there is a medical emergency, in which case you should contact them within 24 hours of missing class/section). Other than these excused absences, **you can miss class 2 times without penalty and section 1 time without penalty.**

Weekly sections: Sections are run in a discussion format and are designed to provide hands-on experience with course material. Please come to section prepared to discuss the readings, class material, writing assignments, and your own analytical questions. The quality of your contribution and your level of engagement are crucial to the evaluation of your participation. The ability to listen closely, respect the perspectives of your peers, and refrain from dominating discussion is as important as speaking in class and contributing directly to the conversation.

Analytical discussion questions on course readings: Over the course of the semester, students will be responsible for preparing 3 analytical questions about the course readings (starting in Week 4). These questions will be used to inform section discussions. On the weeks that you choose to submit a question, you will do so via email to your TF. **Questions are due at 9:00 PM on Wednesday evenings.** These questions should demonstrate a critical engagement with the material. Focus on something you find particularly interesting, enlightening, or troubling about the reading that you would like to discuss in section. Perhaps you discover a contradiction, or there is something that you find confusing. You may relate the readings to other material that has been covered in class or to something you observed in your everyday life. You can give some context or offer some framing for your question, but please keep questions short and to the point (they should not exceed one paragraph). While great questions may emerge from a deep reading of a single text, many of the best

questions will aim to engage multiple readings and their relationship to each other. **Please bring your analytical questions to section, and be prepared to share and discuss them.**

Papers: Writing assignments for this course will ask you to critically evaluate course material, synthesize multiple perspectives and theories, and apply concepts to new situations. Prompts will be distributed in class and are due on the dates indicated in the course schedule. Papers should be submitted online using the dropbox on the “Assignments” page of the course website. **One partial grade will be deducted from papers that are turned in late** (for example, an A- paper would be given a B+). Another partial grade will be taken off for each additional day that the paper is late.

Electronic devices: For the purpose of fostering an active and interactional learning environment, **computers, tablets, and cellphones will not be allowed in class or in section.** Please be prepared to take notes with pen and paper. Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability should notify the professor, and may present a letter from the AEO. All discussions will remain confidential

Mutual respect: Meaningful and constructive dialogue is encouraged in this class and requires a degree of mutual respect, willingness to listen, and tolerance of opposing points of view. Respect for individual differences and alternative viewpoints will be maintained at all times in this class. Actions which make the atmosphere intimidating, uncomfortable, or hostile to individuals are therefore regarded as serious offenses

Grading system and standards: Great care is taken in grading assignments. Please do not hesitate to schedule a meeting with the instructor or TF if you would like to know more about how to improve on future assignments. If you ask for an assignment to be re-graded, please note that the grade may be revised up or down upon re-evaluation. The course follows the grading system for Harvard College. The complete Harvard College grading system can be found online in the Handbook for Students.

Academic integrity and collaboration: Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work and you may find it useful to brainstorm with your peers. However, you should ensure that *any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic.* You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. **Do not turn in someone else’s work – in part, or in full – as your own.**

Readings: All readings are required, and it is expected that the reading assigned for each class session will be completed before the start of that class. Engagement with the readings is critical for class and section participation and for the completion of writing assignments.

The course books are available for purchase at the Harvard COOP, but remember that new and used copies may be available at a reduced price through online booksellers. Readings marked with a * are available through the course website at:

<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/21801/files/folder/Course%20Readings>

Course Schedule

Week 1. *Introduction to Sociology 24* January 24 & January 26

Tuesday, January 24th

No readings

Thursday, January 26th

*Leigh, Andrew. 2015. “*Why should we care about inequality?*”

Part 1: Social Class

Week 2. *Unequal Childhoods part 1* January 31 & February 2

Tuesday, January 31st

Unequal Childhoods Chapters 1, 2, 3

Thursday, February 2nd

Unequal Childhoods Chapters 4 & 5

*Carter, Prudence L. 2005. *Keepin' it Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*. Ch. 2 (p. 1-30)

Week 3. *Unequal Childhoods part 2* February 7 & February 9

Tuesday, February 7th

Unequal Childhoods Chapters 6 & 7

Thursday, February 9th

Unequal Childhoods Chapters 8, 10, 12

Week 4. *Inequality by Design part 1* February 14 & February 16

Tuesday, February 14th

*Herrnstein, Richard J. and Charles Murray. 1994. *The Bell Curve*. Preface & Introduction.

Inequality by Design Chapters 1 & 2

Thursday, February 16th

Inequality by Design Chapters 3 & 4

Week 5. *Inequality by Design part 2* February 21 & February 23

Tuesday, February 21st

Inequality by Design Chapters 6 & 7

Thursday, February 23rd

**The Bell Curve* Chapter 13 (p. 269-303)

Inequality by Design Chapter 8

Monday, February 27th – *PAPER 1 DUE*

Part 2: Race and Ethnicity

Week 6. *American Apartheid* February 28 & March 2

Tuesday, February 28th
American Apartheid Chapters 1 & 2

Thursday, March 2nd
American Apartheid Chapters 3, 4, 5

Week 7. *When Work Disappears* March 7 & March 9

Tuesday, March 7th
When Work Disappears Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2

Thursday, March 9th
When Work Disappears Chapters 3, 4, 5

MARCH 14 & 16 – SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

Week 8. *Black Wealth/White Wealth* part 1 March 21 & March 23

Tuesday, March 21st
Black Wealth/White Wealth Chapters 1 & 2

Thursday, March 23rd
Black Wealth/White Wealth Chapters 3 & 4

Week 9. *Black Wealth/White Wealth* part 2 March 28 & March 30

Tuesday, March 28th
Black Wealth/White Wealth Chapters 5 & 6

Thursday, March 30th
Black Wealth/White Wealth Chapter 7

Monday, April 3rd – *PAPER 2 DUE*

Part 3: Sex and Gender

Week 10. *The Second Shift* part 1 April 4 & April 6

Tuesday, April 4th
The Second Shift Chapters 1, 2, 3

Thursday, April 6th

The Second Shift Chapters 4, 6, 7

Week 11. *The Second Shift* part 2

April 11 & April 13

Tuesday, April 11th

The Second Shift Chapters 5, 8, 9, 10

Thursday, April 13th

The Second Shift Chapters 12, 13, 15

Week 12. *Opting Out?*

April 18 & April 20

Tuesday, April 18th

Opting Out? Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2

Thursday, April 20th

Opting Out? Chapters 3, 4, 5

Monday, April 24th – *PAPER 3 DUE*

Week 13. *Course wrap-up*

April 25

Tuesday, April 25th

*Jencks, Christopher. 1972. *Inequality*. Chapter 1.

Monday, May 8th – *FINAL PROJECT DUE*