**Through the Looking Glass: The Intersection of Race, Ethnicity and Gender with Social Class in America**

**First Year Seminar**

**118**

**Fall 2014**

Meets MWF 11-11:50 AM

Room King 335

Instructor: Clovis White

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**Office:** 301 A King Building

**Office Hrs:** M 2:30-4PM; TTH 10-12

or by appointment

**Course Description:**

Where we live and how we think are not altogether random but often reflect larger societal influences. To understand the relationship among social statuses (race, ethnicity, gender, social class) and everyday life experiences, this seminar focuses on the nature of and impact of social class and inequality on our lives. Many important scholars of social inequality use social location and environment to help explain the patterns of inequality that persist in the United States. In this seminar we will explore the theories and the social geography of contemporary America by using current social theory and empirical data emphasizing how demographic and social factors are entwined and effect individual lives.

**Required Texts:**


**Course Objectives:**

**Objective 1: Developing a Sociological Imagination:** In contrast to our personal view of the social world, the course seeks to broaden our understanding of the dynamics associated with society as it relates to social inequality. In doing so, you will be challenged to develop a “sociological perspective” to explain and analyze social relations.
**Objective 2: Understanding and Utilizing Theoretical Approaches:** The objective here is for students to explore and gain an understanding and appreciation of the various sociological theories (explanations) developed on social inequality and their application in social research.

**Objective 3: Accessing and Interpreting Empirical Data:** Just as students must engage in the explanations for social class, students must develop minimal skills for gathering, analyzing and interpreting data on social class and its relationship to other requisite social characteristics.

**Objective 4: Developing Information Literacy:** Students will develop knowledge of the available resources important to the examination of social phenomenon.

**Objective 5: Developing Skills to Think and Write Critically:** In this course students will be encouraged to develop techniques to think and write critically through various exercises within and outside of class.

**Objective 6: Developing Community Awareness:** To gain a greater appreciation and understanding of social class and its impact on social lives, students will engage in an exploration of the demography of one local community as well as their own.

**Grading:**

**Course Attendance and Participation:** All students are expected to attend and participate in class activities. Class attendance will be taken. Students will be allowed two unexcused absences. Unexcused absences beyond the two will lead to a lowering of the final participation grade. This is 20% of your final grade.

**Exercises:** Each student will be responsible for completing exercises throughout the semester. For the most part each of these exercises will involve the application of experiential activities (individual or group) and/or research within the sociological realm. Using data or experiences students will be asked to write a 2-3 page paper as it relates to the specific exercise. Each one of these papers are to be double spaced and in paragraph format. Font size should be 12 point and preferably Times New Roman font. All the exercises must be completed. This is 50% of your final grade. Below is a brief description of the exercises to be completed.

**Exercise 1: REFLECTION ON SOCIAL CLASS:** In this exercise you will spend some time reflecting upon your understanding of sociology and experience with social class.
Exercise 2: REFLECTION ON SOCIAL CLASS IN THE OBERLIN COMMUNITY AND YOUR OWN COMMUNITY: You will be asked to take a walking/bike/car tour of the Oberlin and reflect upon what you discovered about social class in this community. On such a tour you will be asked to record and infer on the class, racial, and housing make-up of the community and how they compare to your community.

Exercise 3: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF CENSUS DATA. In this exercise each student is to identify Lorain County, Oberlin and your own communities and locate such demographic indicators as racial/ethnic distributions, home ownership rates, average family size, median family income, etc. in those areas using data from the U.S. Census Bureau via FactFinder http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t. You will compare and contrast the data with evidence in the tour of Oberlin.

Exercise 4: EXPLORING A RESEARCH TOPIC AND LITERATURE ON SOCIAL CLASS: CONSTRUCTING ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE REVIEW. Drawing upon a class session on library research in social sciences, you will be asked to explore and develop a topic as that relates to social class. Here you have the opportunity to take what “troubles” you about social class and investigate it in a more academic way. Using information literacy techniques acquired in class, you will also be expected to conduct research and prepare an annotated bibliography and review on that topic.

Exercise 5: REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE IN ONE’S OWN SCHOOL. Much like the first exercise you must reflect on your school experiences and the schools in your area. You will be asked to describe your high school and it location and your sense of its quality of education. Moreover, you will be asked to reflect on your experience in comparison to that which is described in Kozol’s book, Shame of the Nation and the role of social class differences in these settings.

Essays: At three points during the semester, you will complete an essay which will require you to apply various concepts, theories and/or related ideas to subject matters that you have been studying up to that point. These essays will be given to you in advance and will require completion within a week of their distribution.

Grade Distribution

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<th>Participation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Exercises</td>
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<td>Response essays</td>
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**Honor Code**

On all assignments, you are expected to follow the guidelines as established by the Oberlin College Honor System.

http://new.oberlin.edu/office/dean-of-students/honor/students.dot

As such, you are required to follow code to the letter and write and sign at the end of each academic exercise submitted for credit the following: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this exam/assignment”. The default of this statement is that you are required to do your own work without the help from others not explicitly authorized by me (You may, however, use campus resources, such as the library, composition instructors, or writing tutors).

**Changes**

During the course of the semester there may be slight changes in the readings, assignments or discussions as new information comes in place. Please be aware of these and take the responsibility to address them. I will give you fair warning about any changes.

**Class Policies**

- **Ground rules: Be respectful.** Let it be known that not everyone is going to agree with every author’s comments, perspectives nor my comments for that matter. It may at times become tense in class over certain topics that may appear to be of a personal nature. And I encourage you to openly express your thoughts, ideas, and experiences in written assignments or discussions. It is also important that you support your assertions with literature/research on the topic. Ultimately, be respectful of the rights of others to their thoughts and opinions. Be cognizant that we are engaging in intellectual learning and by no means assume that everything will be resolved in our discussion.

- **Open door policy:** I require all of you to see me outside of class, during office hours or by appointment, especially as it relates to assignments and any questions or comments you may have about course content or related issues. Do not hesitate to ask for help!

- **Special Needs or Disabilities:** If you require special accommodations in this class, please see me at your earliest convenience so that we can address these needs in a timely manner. You will need to present a letter from the office of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters Hall G27) documenting the accommodations needed. Please contact Ms. Jane Boomer at x5588 or visit http://new.oberlin.edu/office/disability-services/
• Other concerns:
  1. TURN YOUR CELL PHONES OFF OR SILENCE THEM DURING CLASS PLEASE!
  2. PLEASE DO NOT EAT IN CLASS. It is very distracting. (besides some of us may be hungry as well!). Drinking a beverage is fine.
  3. Do not talk or whisper conversations with your neighbors during class. This is distracting to the rest of the class and to me!
  4. AVOID BEING LATE TO CLASS. This is also disturbing to the class and me.
  5. You may NOT have your laptops open.

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WEEKLY READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS SCHEDULE
BB=Articles or readings can be found on Blackboard

WEEK 1 SEPTEMBER 3, 5 INTRODUCTION: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Readings:
1. Scott Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch.1. The Gordian Knot of Race, Class and Gender”;
2. C.Wright Mills, “The Promise”, excerpted from The Sociological Imagination (BB)

WEEK 2 SEPTEMBER 8, 10, 12: GLOBAL INEQUALITY, DIMENSIONS OF CLASS AND INEQUALITY

Readings:
1. Will Barratt, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 1 “A Starting Point”. Ch. 2. “Your experience and social class” and Ch. 3. “Class Myths”
2. Sernau, Social Inequality in a Global Age, Ch. 2 “The Great Debate” and Ch. 3. “The Global Divide: Inequality across Societies”.

EXERCISE 1: REFLECTION EXERCISE ON CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS: DUE FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12
WEEK 3  SEPTEMBER 15, 17, 19: PRIVILEGE and CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS/AWARENESS

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 4, Class privilege
2. Barratt, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 4 “Social Class Identity”
3. Monica Bielski, “My Hidden Class-Consciousness” (from Podis and Podis, Eds. Working with Student Writers, (BB)

WEEK 4  SEPTEMBER 22, 24, 26: REPRODUCTION OF CLASS: CAPITAL/ INFORMATION LITERACY:

Readings:
1. Barratt, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 9 “Class as Capital”
2. Jay Macleod, Ain’t No Makin It, (all)

EXERCISE 2: REFLECTION ON OBERLIN COMMUNITY: DUE FRIDAY, SEPT. 26

WEEK 5  SEPTEMBER 29, OCTOBER 1, 3: REPRODUCTION OF CLASS CONT’D: CLASS AS INCOME, OCCUPATION, PRESTIGE, AND CULTURE

Readings:
1. Barratt, Social Class on Campus, Chapters. 8, 11-13
2. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 7. Status Prestige

ESSAY 1: DUE OCTOBER 3

WEEK 6  OCTOBER 6, 8, 10: RACIAL AND ETHNIC INEQUALITY: WHITE PRIVILEGE AND CLASS

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 5, Race and Ethnic Inequality
3. Barratt, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 5 (“Majority Class Student Experience), and Ch. 14, “Class, Ethnicity and Gender”.
4. Video Clip in class (Tim Wise on White privilege)

EXERCISE 3: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10
WEEK 7  OCTOBER 13, 15, 17: PERPETUATION OF RACE AND ETHNIC INEQUALITY: WEALTH AND COLORED BLINDNESS

Readings:
1. Barratt, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 6 (Minority Class Student Experience”).

WEEK 8  FALL RECESS  OCTOBER 18-26

WEEK 9  OCTOBER 27, 29, 31: GENDER INEQUALITY AND CLASS

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 6. Gender and Class
3. Video in class: Killing Us Softly 4 (DVD 6853)

WEEK 10  NOVEMBER 3, 5, 7: POLITICS AND POWER

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 8. “Politics and Power”

EXERCISE 4: RESEARCH TOPIC AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON SOCIAL CLASS DUE FRIDAY NOVEMBER 7

WEEK 11  NOVEMBER 10, 12, 14: POVERTY AND CLASS: WHO’S TO BLAME?: FAMILY AND CULTURE of POVERTY

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 10 Poverty and Place,
4. Video in class: POVERTY IN AMERICA (2006-7)

ESSAY 2: DUE FRIDAY NOVEMBER 14
WEEK 12  NOVEMBER 17, 19, 21  THE WORKING POOR AND CURING POVERTY: WHAT ARE THE POSSIBILITIES?

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 11 Reversing the Race to the Bottom.

WEEK 13  NOVEMBER 24, 26: EDUCATION AND CLASS

Readings:
1. Barratt, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 10, “Class as Education”
2. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 9. Moving Up: Education and Mobility
3. Jonathan Kozol, Shame of the Nation, all
4. Video outside of class: “UNEQUAL EDUCATION: FAILING OUR CHILDREN” on reserve in library.

WEEK 14  DECEMBER 1, 3, 5: EDUCATION AND CLASS CONT’D

Readings:
1. Howard Gardner, “Cracking Open the IQ Box”, from Fraser, Ed. The Bell Curve Wars (BB)
2. Alan Wolfe, “Has There Been a Cognitive Revolution in America? The Flawed Sociology of The Bell Curve, from Fraser, Ed. The Bell Curve Wars (BB)

EXERCISE 5: REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE IN OWN SCHOOLS. DUE FRIDAY, DEC. 5.

WEEK 15  DECEMBER 8, 10, 12: OTHER CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL INEQUALITY: WHAT CAN WE DO?

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 12. Challenging the System: Social Movements
2. Barrett, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 16 “What can anyone do?”

WEEK 16  DECEMBER 13-16  READING PERIOD

ESSAY 3: DUE DECEMBER TBA