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

First Year Seminar 118
Fall 2015
Meets MWF 1:30-2:20 PM
Room King 325

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Office: 301 A King Building
Office Hrs: MW 2:30-4 PM or by appointment

Course Description:

Where we live and how we think are not altogether random events but often reflect larger societal influences. It is through our social statuses (race, ethnicity, gender, social class) and everyday life experiences in particular that we come to develop into the human beings that we are. In fact, many important scholars of social inequality use social location and environment to help explain our patterns of behavior and inequality that persist in the United States. As such, in this seminar we hope to explore through the eyes or mirror of sociology and self-exploration the nature and impact of social position and inequality on our lives. It is “through [this] looking glass” that we get to see how demographic and social factors are entwined and affect our individual lives.

Required Texts:


Course Objectives:

Objective 1: Developing a Sociological Imagination: In contrast to our personal view of the social world, this 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: Developing a basic understanding of the various theoretical approaches toward social inequality: 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 some appreciation for the gathering, analyzing and interpreting of social data on social class and other social characteristics.

Objective 4: Developing information literacy: Students will develop knowledge of the kinds and the availability of resources important to the examination of any social science endeavor.

Objective 5: Developing skills to think and write critically about your own experiences and academic renderings with social inequality: In this course students will be encouraged to develop different way to think and write critically about their own experiences as well as the various intellectual aspects of social class through 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 the communities around Oberlin 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 40% of your final grade. Below is a brief description of the exercises to be completed.

Exercise 1: REFLECTION ON SOCIAL CLASS IN YOUR COMMUNITY: In this exercise you will spend some time reflecting upon your understanding of sociology and your experiences with social class.
Exercise 2: REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CLASS IN OBERLIN AND YOUR COMMUNITY. You will do two things in this exercise. First, you will be asked to take a walking/bike/car tour of the Oberlin and reflect upon physical indicators of social class in this community. Next, you will compare, analyze and reflect on census data on Oberlin and your community using data from the U.S. Census Bureau website called FactFinder (http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml).

Exercise 3: EXPLORING A RESEARCH TOPIC AND LITERATURE ON SOCIAL CLASS: CONSTRUCTING ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY. Drawing upon a class session in 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 be expected to conduct research and prepare an annotated bibliography on that topic.

Exercise 4: REFLECTION ON YOUR SCHOOL EXPERIENCE AND SCHOOL INEQUALITY. 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 the context of our examination of school inequality.

Essays: At two points during the semester, you will complete an essay which requires you to apply various concepts, theories and/or related ideas to subject matters that we 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.

Prompts/Reaction papers: At various points during the semester I will ask to submit a 1-2 page reaction to an assigned reading or specific prompt. There will be five of these reaction papers. I will pose one or two questions and have you react to them by the next class time.

Grade Distribution

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<th>Component</th>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Exercises</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 papers, exercises, exams, quizzes, etc, submitted for credit the following: "**I have adhered to the Honor Code in this 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:** My office (301A King) is open during office hours (2:30-4 pm MW) 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. If you are consistently late for class this may have negative bearing on your final grade.
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  AUGUST 31, SEPTEMBER 2, 4: INTRODUCTION: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: What is the sociological perspective and social inequality?

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

WEEK 2  SEPTEMBER 9, 11: GLOBAL INEQUALITY: What is the nature of social inequality in our world? What is the cost of social inequality? What about you and social inequality? What price do we pay for social inequality?

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality in a Global Age, Ch. 2 “The Great Debate” and Ch. 3. “The Global Divide: Inequality across Societies”
2. Will Barratt, Chapt. 1 “A Starting Point”

WEEK 3  SEPTEMBER 14, 16, 18: DIMENSIONS OF CLASS AND INEQUALITY: What is social class? What are your experiences with social class?

Readings:
1. Video in class: “Social Class “[DVD 7002 (2008)] in class
3. Will Barratt, Social Class on Campus Ch. 2. “Your experience and social class” and Ch. 3. “Class Myths”
4. Monica Bielski, “My Hidden Class-Consciousness” (from Podis and Podis, Eds. Working with Student Writers, (BB)

EXERCISE 1: REFLECTION EXERCISE ON CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS: DUE FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

WEEK 4  SEPTEMBER 21, 25: PRIVILEGE and CLASS

SEPTEMBER 23: NO CLASS IN OBSERVANCE OF YOM KIPPUR

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 4, Class privilege
2. Barratt, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 4 “Social Class Identity”
WEEK 5  
**SEPTEMBER 28, 30 and OCTOBER 2:** REPRODUCTION OF CLASS: CAPITAL

**Readings:**
1. Barratt, *Social Class on Campus*, Ch. 9 “Class as Capital”

WEEK 6  
**OCTOBER 5, 7, 9:** REPRODUCTION OF CLASS CONT’D: Class as income, occupation, prestige, and culture

**Readings:**
2. Sernau, *Social Inequality*, Ch. 7. Status Prestige

**EXERCISE 2:** REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA ON OBERLIN AND YOUR COMMUNITY: DUE MONDAY, OCTOBER 5

WEEK 7  
**OCTOBER 12, 14, 16:** 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)

**ESSAY 1: DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16**

WEEK 8  
**FALL RECESS**  
**OCTOBER 17-25**
WEEK 9  OCTOBER 26, 28:  PERPETUATION OF RACE AND ETHNIC INEQUALITY: WEALTH & COLORED BLINDNESS

OCTOBER 30:  INFORMATION LITERACY SESSION:  
Class to meet in Academic Commons 
Classroom, Mudd Library 113

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

WEEK 10  NOVEMBER 2, 4, 6:  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 11  NOVEMBER 9, 11, 13:  POLITICS AND POWER

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

EXERCISE 3:  RESEARCH TOPIC, ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON SOCIAL CLASS DUE FRIDAY NOVEMBER 13

WEEK 12  NOVEMBER 16, 18, 20:  POVERTY AND CLASS: WHO’S TO BLAME?: Individual, family, culture or structure?

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 10 Poverty and Place
2. Edward Royce, Power and Poverty, Chapters 1-4 (BB)
5. Video in class: POVERTY IN AMERICA (2006-7)
WEEK 13  NOVEMBER 23, 25:  THE WORKING POOR AND CURING POVERTY: WHAT ARE THE POSSIBILITIES?

NOVEMBER 27:  NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING RECESS

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 11 Reversing the Race to the Bottom.
2. Royce, Poverty and Power, Chapters 5- end (BB)

WEEK 14  NOVEMBER 30, DECEMBER 2, 4: EDUCATION AND CLASS

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 9. Moving Up: Education and Mobility
2. Video inside of class: “UNEQUAL EDUCATION: FAILING OUR CHILDREN” on reserve in library.
3. Ann Mullen, Degrees of Inequality, (all)
4. Barratt, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 10, “Class as Education”

EXERCISE 4: REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE IN OWN SCHOOLS. DUE FRIDAY, DEC. 4.

WEEK 15  DECEMBER 7, 9, 11:  EDUCATION, CLASS AND OTHER CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL INEQUALITY: WHAT CAN WE DO?

Readings:
1. Ann Mullen, Degrees of Inequality, Chapters 5-7
3. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 12. Challenging the System: Social Movements
4. Barrett, Social Class on Campus, Ch. 16 “What can anyone do?”

WEEK 16  DECEMBER 12-15:  READING PERIOD

ESSAY 2: DUE Friday, December 18 by 9 pm.