**First Year Seminar**  
**FYSP: 118**  
**Fall 2004**

*Through the Looking Glass: The Intersection of Race, Ethnicity and Gender with Social Class in Contemporary America (3SS, WR, CD)*

Instructor: Clovis White, Sociology  
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Office Hours:  
W 3:30-4:30,  
TTh 1:30-3:00 or by appointment

**Course Description:**

Population patterns typically are not due to randomness and often are a reflection of the amalgamation of racial and class defined realities. In order to better understand the relationship among social statuses (race, ethnicity, gender), social class and everyday life experiences, this course will focus on social demography and theories of identity formation and group interaction. Many important scholars of race and class use social location and environment to help explain the patterns of inequality and racism that persist in the United States. In this seminar, will explore the social geography of contemporary America by using current empirical data to investigate the demographic and social portraits of the United States in the new millennium. Emphasis will be placed on how demographic and social factors are entwined and how they interact to affect individual lives and identities. Issues to be discussed include multiracial identification, definitions of family and household, and indicators of social class

**Required Texts:**


**Recommended Text:**

Course Goals:

Goal 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 society as it relates to social inequality. In doing so, students will be challenged to develop a “sociological perspective” to explain and analyze social relations.

Goal 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.

Goal 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.

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

Goal 5: Developing Skills to Write Critically: In this course students will be encouraged to develop techniques to think and write critically.

Goal 6: Developing Community Awareness: To gain a greater appreciation and understanding of social class and its impact on social lives students will engage in activities in the local communities.

Grading:

Course attendance and participation: All students are expected to attend and participate in class activities. Students will be allowed two unexcused absences. Unexcused absences beyond the two will lead to a lowering of the final participation grade. This is 10% of your final grade.

Examinations: There will be one written examination during the course. The examination is mid-term take-home exam. Detailed discussion of the exam coverage and structure will be given before the exam but it will essentially consist of essay questions focused on material explored since the beginning of the semester. This is 20% of your final grade.

Exercises: Each student will be responsible for completing FIVE exercises throughout the semester. For the most part each of these exercises will involve the application of experiential activities (individual or group) 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. All the exercises must be completed. This is 50% of your final grade.
Exercise 1: Reflection exercise on class/social awareness of class:
I would like you to spend sometime reflecting upon your understanding and experience with social class. In doing so you might wish to consider these questions: What is social class to you? What social class do you see yourself in? When was the first time that you were aware of your social class? Is your social class different or the same as those of most other Oberlin College students?

Due on Monday, September 20

Exercise 2: Finding research topic and developing hypothesis: Annotated Bibliography.
In this exercise we want you to explore the issue of developing a research topic and constructing a hypothesis as it relates to the topic of social class. You will be expected to describe a research topic (e.g., What is the relationship between social class and education?) and propose a hypothesis on the relationship between these social phenomenon (e.g., the higher your level of education the higher your social class.) Once you have developed the hypothesis, you are expected to identify research, which may or may not support your hypothesis in the form of an annotated bibliography.

Due Monday, October 4

Exercise 3: Reflection on Oberlin community experience and data analysis:
You will be asked to take a walking tour of the Oberlin community and reflect upon what you discovered in this community. More specifically, you should reflect on these questions: How would you describe the racial/ethnic composition of the neighborhoods and applying census data? What is the condition of the housing in the area? What type of a neighborhood is the area (e.g., retail, homes, etc.)? What “clues” do you observe that indicate social class?

Due on Monday, November 8

Exercise 4: Analysis and interpretation of census data
In this exercise each student is to identify Lorain and Oberlin 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 American FactFinder (http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet).
You will compare and contrast the data with evidence in the tour of Oberlin.

**Due Monday, November 15**

**Exercise 5: Reflection on experience in own schools.**

Much like the first exercise you must reflect a bit about your experience in school and the schools in your area. In doing so consider these questions: Describe your school and its location. Do you consider your school a “good” school to attend? Are all schools the same in their quality of education? What data would you examine to compare schools, especially in Lorain County or in your local community? Are you familiar with schools like those described in the *Savage Inequalities* article? Are social class differences visible in your high school?

**Due Monday, November 29**

**Experiential Activity:** Students will be required to participate in one experiential activity. This activity entails participating in a local community volunteer activity at the Oberlin Community Center. In this activity, students will assist in the distribution of food and learn about social class conditions/characteristics in Oberlin and the surrounding area. This is 20% of your final grade.

**Grade Distribution**

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<td>Exercises</td>
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<td>Community Outreach Activity</td>
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**Honor Code**

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

([http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html))

As such, you are required to follow the letter of that code 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.

**WEEKLY READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS SCHEDULE**

Note: On Reserve = In reserve in Mudd Library or on ERES (Electronic Reserve)

**WEEK 1. September 3,8,10  INTRODUCTIONS AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY**

Readings:
3. (On Reserve) C.Wright Mills, “The Promise”, excerpted from *The Sociological Imagination*
4. (On Reserve) Monica Bielski, “My Hidden Class-Consciousness” (from Podis and Podis, Eds. *Working with Student Writers*)

**WEEK 2  September 13,15,17  CLASS AND INEQUALITY**

Readings:
1. Sernau, *Worlds Apart*, Ch. 2. The Global Debate: Inequality across Societies; Ch. 3. Class Privilege
2. Zwieg, *The Working Class Majority*, Ch. 2. What We Think about When We Think About Class

**WEEK 3  September 20,22,24  THEORY (MARX, DURKEIM WEBER) AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF CLASS: DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CLASS AND ITS PERSISTANCE**

Readings:
1. (On Reserve) E.O.Wright, Ch 2. Class Structure, Ch. 3. The Transformation of the American Class Structure, 1960-1990, from *Class Counts*
EXERCISE 1: Reflection exercise on class/social awareness of class: Due Monday, September 20

LIBRARY PRESENTATION: Locating Information in the Library with reference librarian, Cynthia Comer, CLASS MEETS ON THE 4TH FLOOR IN MUDD LIBRARY, Monday, September 20th

WEEK 4   Sept. 27,29, Oct 1   CLASS MATTERS:

Readings:
1. hooks, Where We Stand: class matters (entire text)
2. Zweig, Working Class Majority, Ch. 3. Why is Class Important?

Video  “People Like Us: Social Class in America”, in class
Web site: http://www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/

WEEK 5   October 4,6,8   CLASS AND OTHER DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY (Race and gender)

Readings:
1. Sernau, Worlds Apart, Ch. 4.Race and Class, Ch. 5. Gender and Class, Ch. 6. Status Prestige
2. (On Reserve) Sarah Lipsitz Bem, “Gender, Sexuality and Inequality” (from A Nation Divided, ed., Phyllis Moen, Donna Dempster-McClain and Henry A. Walker.), Ch. 4
   URL: http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00031224%28199102%2956%3A1%3C101%3ATCSORA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9

EXERCISE 2: Finding research topic and developing hypothesis: Annotated Bibliography, Due Monday, October 4

WEEK 6   October 13,15,17   SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF CLASS AND COMMUNITIES

Readings:
1. Jay Macleod, Ain’t No Makin It, Ch. 3. Teenagers in Clarendon Heights: The Hallway Hangers and the Brothers, Ch. 4. The Influence of the Family, Ch. 5. The World of Work: Aspirations of the Hangers and Brothers, Ch. 6. School: Preparing for the Competition, Ch. 7. Leveled Aspirations: Social
Reproduction Takes its Toll, Ch. 8. Reproduction Theory Reconsidered, Ch. 9. The Hallway Hangers: Dealing in Despair, Ch. 10. The Brothers: Dreams Deferred, Ch. 11. Conclusion: Outclassed and Outcast (e)

TAKE HOME - MID TERM EXAMINATION: Due Friday, October 15

WEEK 7 FALL RECESS October 16-24

WEEK 8 October 25,27,29 SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF CLASS AND COMMUNITIES Cont’d

Readings:
2. (On Reserve) William J. Wilson, “Jobless Poverty: A new form of social dislocation in the inner-city ghetto”, Ch. 7 (in Moen et al.)
3. (On Reserve) Elijah Anderson, “Down Germantown Avenue” (from *Code of the Street*)
4. (On Reserve) Teresa A. Sullivan, Elizabeth Warren and Jay Lawrence Westbrook, Ch. 1. Americans in Financial Crisis, Ch. 2 Middle-Class and Broke: The Demography of Bankruptcy, from *The Fragile Middle Class: Americans in Debt*
5. (On Reserve) Frederick R. Strobel and Wallace C. Peterson, Ch.4. The Disenfranchised Middle Class, from *The Coming Class War and How to Avoid It*

WEEK 9 November 1,3,5: FAMILY AND CLASS

Readings:
2. (On Reserve) Judith Treas, “Diversity in American Families”, Ch. 13 (in Moen, et. al.)
6. (On Reserve) Elijah Anderson, “Decent and Street Families” (from *Code of the Street*)

Experience Activity: Visit to Oberlin Community Center: Date TBA
WEEK 10  November 8,10,12  RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION AND CLASS

Readings:
2. (On Reserve) David Brown and Marlene Lee, “Persisting Inequality between (from A Nation Divided, Moen et al.) Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan America”, Ch. 8 (from A Nation Divided, Moen, et al.)

EXERCISE 3: Reflection on Oberlin Community Experience and data analysis: Nov. 8

WEEK 11  November 15,17,19

Readings:
3. (On Reserve) Mitchell Duneier, Introduction, How Sixth Avenue B

EXERCISE 4: Analysis and interpretation of census data: Due on Monday, Nov. 15

WEEK 12  November 22,24  EDUCATION AND CLASS

Readings:
1. (On Reserve) Jonathan Kozol, excerpted reading from Savage Inequalities
2. Sernau, Worlds Apart, Ch. 8. Moving Up: Education and Mobility

Video: “Unequal Education: Failing Our Children”, in class

WEEK 13  Nov. 29, Dec. 1,3  EDUCATION AND CLASS CONT’D

Readings:
1. (On Reserve) Howard Gardner, “Cracking Open the IQ Box”, from Fraser, Ed. The Bell Curve Wars
2. (On Reserve) Alan Wolfe, “Has There Been a Cognitive Revolution in America? The Flawed Sociology of The Bell Curve, from Fraser, Ed. The Bell Curve Wars
EXERCISE 5: Reflection on experience in own schools. Due Wednesday, Nov. 29

WEEK 14 December 6, 8, 10 CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Readings:
1. Sernau, Worlds Apart, Ch. 7. Power and Politics, Ch. 9. Reversing the Race to the Bottom: Poverty and Policy, Ch. 10. Challenging the System: Social Movements
3. (On Reserve) Frederick R. Strobel and Wallace C. Peterson, Ch. 6. Some Solutions for Class Harmony, from The Coming Class War and How to Avoid It

WEEK 15 December 13 Wrap-up/ Last day of class