First Year Seminar 118
Fall 2012
King 335

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

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Office Hours: T-Th 3-4:30pm or by appointment

Course Description:
Population patterns typically are not due to randomness and often are a reflection of the amalgamation of racial, gender 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 theoretical discussions of these statuses primarily in the sociological literature. Many important scholars of race, gender, 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, we explore the social geography of contemporary America by using current empirical data to investigate the demographic and social portraits of the United States. 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 racism, gender differences, definitions of family and household, and indicators of social class.

Required Texts:
MacLeod, Jay, Ain’t No Makin’ It. Westview. 1995 or latest edition
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 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.

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 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.

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 an exploration of the demography of one local community.

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 10% of your final grade.

Exam: There will be one written examination during the course. The examination is a mid-term in-class 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) 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 EXERCISE ON AWARENESS OF SOCIAL CLASS:** In this exercise you will spend sometime reflecting upon your understanding and experience with social class. In doing so you can contemplate the concept of social class and your own social class.

**Due on Monday, September 17**

**EXERCISE 2: DEVELOPING A RESEARCH TOPIC AND LITERATURE SEARCH: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY.** In this exercise you will be asked to explore a research question and topic as it relates to the topic of social class. You will be expected to describe a research topic and prepare an annotated bibliography on that topic.

**Due Monday, October 8**

**EXERCISE 3: REFLECTION ON THE OBERLIN COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE:** You will be asked to take a walking/bike/car tour of the Oberlin and reflect upon what you discovered in this community. On such a tour you will be asked to record information and reflect on some of the social, racial, and housing characteristics of the community and how they compare to your community?

**Due on Monday, November 12**

**EXERCISE 4: 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 American FactFinder


You will compare and contrast the data with evidence in the tour of Oberlin.

**Due Monday, November 26**

**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.

**Due Friday, December 14**
**Grade Distribution**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercises</td>
<td>50% (10% EACH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Term Examination</td>
<td>20%</td>
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| Total                     | 100%       |

**Honor Code**

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

https://new.oberlin.edu/arts-and-sciences/academic-resources-and-support/honor-code.dot

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.

**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 encourage 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://oncampus.oberlin.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_tab_group_id=null &url=/webapps/blackboard/execute/courseMain?course_id=_24550_1&](http://oncampus.oberlin.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_tab_group_id=null &url=/webapps/blackboard/execute/courseMain?course_id=_24550_1&).

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

WEEK 1  SEPTEMBER 5, 7  INTRODUCTIONS: SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Readings:
2. C.Wright Mills, “The Promise”, excerpted from *The Sociological Imagination* (BB)

WEEK 2  SEPTEMBER 10, 12, 14  GLOBAL INEQUALITY, THEORY AND DIMENSIONS OF CLASS AND INEQUALITY

Readings:

WEEK 3  SEPTEMBER 17, 19, 21  PRIVILEGE AND SOCIAL CLASS AWARENESS

Readings:
1. Sernau, *Social Inequality*, Ch. 4, Class privilege
2. Zwieg, *The Working Class Majority*, Ch. 2. What We Think about When We Think About Class (BB)

EXERCISE 1: REFLECTION EXERCISE ON CLASS/SOCIAL AWARENESS OF CLASS:
DUE MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

WEEK 4  SEPTEMBER 24, 26 (NO CLASS), 28: SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF CLASS:

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

LIBRARY PRESENTATION: Locating social science information with reference librarian, Cynthia Comer, Friday, September 28th. Location TBA
WEEK 5 OCTOBER 1, 3, 5 SOCIAL REPRODUCTION CONT’D/CLASS & RACIAL INEQUALITY

Readings:
1. Jay Macleod, Ain’t No Makin It, Ch. 6-10.
2. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch.6, Race and Class

WEEK 6 OCTOBER 8, 10, 12 RACIAL INEQUALITY AND CLASS CONT’D.

Readings:
3. White Privilege (TBA)

EXERCISE 2: RESEARCH TOPIC AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY, DUE MONDAY, OCTOBER 8

WEEK 7 OCTOBER 15, 17, 19 RACE AND CLASS CONT’D AND EXAM

Readings: NONE

MID TERM EXAMINATION: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17

WEEK 8 FALL RECESS OCTOBER 20-28

WEEK 9 OCTOBER 29, 31, NOVEMBER 2: GENDER AND CLASS

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 5. Gender and Class
WEEK 10  NOVEMBER 5, 7, 9:  POLITICS AND POWER

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

WEEK 11  NOVEMBER 12, 14, 16: POVERTY AND CLASS: WHO’S TO BLAME?: FAMILY AND CULTURE of POVERTY

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 10 Poverty and Place,
2. Zwieg, The Working Class Majority, Ch. 4. Looking at the “Underclass” (BB)
5. Video: POVERTY IN AMERICA (2006-7)

EXERCISE 3: REFLECTION ON OBERLIN COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE:  DUE FRIDAY, NOV. 16

WEEK 12  NOVEMBER 19, 21  THE CURING POVERTY: WHAT ARE THE POSSIBILITIES?

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

WEEK 13  NOVEMBER 26, 28, 30  EDUCATION AND CLASS

Readings:
1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 9. Moving Up: Education and Mobility
2. Jonathan Kozol, Shame of the Nation, all
3. Video: “UNEQUAL EDUCATION: FAILING OUR CHILDREN”

EXERCISE 4: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF CENSUS DATA: DUE ON MONDAY, NOV. 26
WEEK 14  DECEMBER 3, 5, 7  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)

WEEK 15  DECEMBER 10, 12, 14: OTHER CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL INEQUALITY: HEALTH, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT/ WHAT CAN WE DO?

Readings:

1. Sernau, Social Inequality, Ch. 12. Challenging the System: Social Movements
5. Video: UNEQUAL HEALTH

EXERCISE 5: REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE IN OWN SCHOOLS. DUE FRIDAY, DEC. 14.

WEEK 16  DECEMBER 15-17  READING PERIOD