

# Sociology 151: Social Classes and Inequality

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California State University, Fresno  
College of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology  
Fall 2014, Room SS203, MW 5:30-6:45, 3.0 Units, LEC-70586

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Office Hours: MW 11:00-12:30 and by appointment

**Course Description:** Social inequality in America is characterized by a great paradox. America has more economic inequality than any other industrialized democracy in the world and the gap between rich and poor is growing wider. Yet, themes of prosperity, opportunity, and meritocracy predominantly shape American culture and social policy. This course will explore this paradox by offering students an overview of the causes, consequences, and possible solutions for ameliorating growing social inequality in the United States. This course will address three major themes. We will first discuss how sociologists define, measure, and explain inequality with a focus on dominant classical and contemporary theories of stratification. Next, we will explore the primary institutional mechanisms sociologists argue are responsible for structuring and perpetuating inequality—including the education system, labor markets, the criminal justice system, and residential segregation—and primary axes of inequality such as race and gender stratification. We will conclude the course by analyzing how policies address inequality and how dominant American cultural norms of individual responsibility, meritocracy, and colorblindness complicate collective and political attempts to reduce it. This course will ultimately teach students to think sociologically about how to overcome these challenges.

**Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:** Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Identify primary sources of stratification in the United States;
2. Interpret major sociological debates about the causes and consequences of inequality;
3. Analyze public policies that impact inequality;
4. Critically analyze empirical sociological research on class inequality; and
5. Apply sociological theories and evidence of stratification in written analyzes using secondary sources.

**Method of Instruction:** This course will consist of two lectures per week that integrate discussions of course concepts and readings, along with viewings of relevant documentary films.

**Required Texts and Readings:**

1. Grusky, David B., and Szonja Szelenyi, eds. 2011. *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class, and Gender*. Boulder, CO: Westview.  
(Abbreviated as *IR* on course schedule)

2. Additional course readings, handouts, and announcements available on course Blackboard site. (indicated by a BB on course schedule)

### **Grade Distribution:**

I will calculate your grade in this class as follows and assign letter grades based on the standard University scale (100 – 97 = A+; 96 – 94 = A; 93 – 90 = A-; 89 – 87 = B+; 86 - 84 = B; 83 – 80 = B-; etc.):

- 10 %: Attendance
- 20 %: Exam #1
- 15 %: Theories of Inequality Paper
- 20 %: Exam #2
- 15 %: Axes of Inequality Group Presentation
- 20 %: Addressing Axes of Inequality Paper

There are no extra credit assignments for this course. I will adhere to the University's policy on incompletes.

### **Course Requirements:**

#### *Attendance and Participation*

To learn the most from this course, you must attend class regularly, arrive on-time having carefully read the assigned readings for that class period, and be attentive. I expect everyone to thoughtfully participate in discussion, respectfully engage with others, and exhibit a willingness to learn. I promise to do these things in return. You can miss two class periods without penalty, but excessive (three or more) absences will negatively impact your grade. You will lose a full letter grade from your attendance/participation grade for the third and each subsequent unexcused absence. I will take attendance at the beginning of each class period, so please be on-time to avoid being counted as absent. You are still responsible for any material we covered in class if you are absent. I will excuse absences for serious and compelling reasons for which you can provide documentation.

#### *Exams*

There will be two exams for this course consisting of multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions pertaining to main topics from lectures, course readings and films, and class discussions. Makeup exams will not be available unless for compelling reasons for which you can provide documentation. If a University-approved activity conflicts with an exam, you must schedule a make-up exam with me prior to the exam date.

#### *Written Assignments*

Both written assignments are due to me at the beginning of class on the noted due dates. Turning in your coursework on-time is extremely beneficial to you, as it enables me to grade your work in a timely manner and get you feedback as soon as possible, while it enables you to focus on

subsequent course requirements. I do not accept late papers, unless for serious reasons for which you can provide documentation. Each written assignment should be typed, double spaced, and written in 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins and should include a bibliography using the ASA (American Sociological Association) citation style. A copy of the ASA style guide is posted on the course Blackboard website for your reference. Include page numbers in the footer and your name and course number in one line only as a header on the first page. Do not adjust the margins or font to make the text take up more space on the page; simply write the required number of pages of text. Any deviations from these instructions (including triple or quadruple spacing, margins larger than one inch, no bibliography or incorrect citations, etc.) will each receive an automatic full letter grade deduction.

I have posted the following writing resources on our course Blackboard site for your reference:

1. This course syllabus indicating due dates;
2. The ASA (American Sociological Association) citation style guide;
3. A key to my written feedback;
4. Sample formatted paper as a Word document;
5. *Writing for Sociology* undergraduate writing handbook for sociology courses;
6. Writing Center contact information and overview of support services.

#### First Written Assignment: Theories of Inequality Paper

In class we will discuss the three major classical sociologists' (Marx, Weber, and Durkheim) theories of stratification and class group formation, as well as those of notable contemporary theorists (Davis and Moore, Tumin, Wright, and Bourdieu). Choose any two theorists (Davis and Moore count as one) and compare and contrast how they would explain rising rates of class inequality in the United States today. In three double-space pages, including a bibliographic fourth page, analyze both how they would agree and how their explanations would diverge. Will we discuss this assignment in greater detail as a class.

#### Second Written Assignment: Addressing Axes of Inequality Paper

In five double-spaced pages, including a bibliographic sixth page, analyze how we could address via social policies or programs the axis of inequality you analyzed in your group presentation. I encourage you to think broadly and creatively, including non-governmental options. I will distribute detailed guidelines for the paper in class.

#### *Group Presentations*

During the beginning of the term, students will sign up for one of nine presentation groups on particular axes of inequality (age, sexuality, body size, attractiveness, immigration status, religion, language, technology, (dis)ability status) Groups will consist of four students each. Along with your fellow group members, you will prepare a 15-minute presentation on how that particular form of social inequality takes shape in the U.S., including how it intersects with other forms of inequality. I will distribute more detailed instructions about the presentation after the first exam.

**Course Schedule & Outline:**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings &amp; Assignments Due</u>
Monday, August 25 <sup>th</sup>	Course Introduction and Overview	Course Syllabus
Wednesday, August 27 <sup>th</sup>	How Inequality in the United States is Unique	IR, Ch. 3 (Fischer et al.); Ch. 10 (Grusky and Weeden)
Monday, September 1 <sup>st</sup>	NO CLASS Labor Day Holiday	None
Wednesday, September 3 <sup>rd</sup>	How Sociologists Study and Measure Inequality: Focusing on Class, Race, and Gender	IR, Ch. 33 (Oliver and Shapiro); Ch. 36 (Lorber)
Monday, September 8 <sup>th</sup>	Documentary: <i>Inequality for All</i>	None
Wednesday, September 10 <sup>th</sup>	Classical Theories of Inequality: Marx and Class Conflict	IR, Ch. 5 (Marx)
Monday, September 15 <sup>th</sup>	Classical Theories of Inequality: Weber and Social Status	IR, Ch. 7 (Weber)
Wednesday, September 17 <sup>th</sup>	Classical Theories of Inequality: Durkheim and Social Solidarity	BB, “The Method of Determining this Function,” (Durkheim)
Monday, September 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Contemporary Theories of Social Inequality: Functionalism	IR, Ch. 2 (Davis and Moore)
Wednesday, September 24 <sup>th</sup>	Contemporary Theories of Inequality: Conflict	BB, “Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis” (Tumin)
Monday, September 29 <sup>th</sup>	Contemporary Theories of Social Inequality: Accounting for the Middle Class and Culture	IR, Ch. 6 (Wright); BB, Introduction to <i>Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste</i> (Bourdieu)
Wednesday, October 1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>EXAM #1</b>	None
Monday, October 6 <sup>th</sup>	Inequality at the Extremes: Elites and the “Upper Class”	IR, Ch. 9 (Saez); Ch. 12 (Domhoff)
Wednesday, October 8 <sup>th</sup>	Inequality at the Extremes: Poverty and the “Underclass”	IR, Ch. 15 (Ehrenreich)
Monday, October 13 <sup>th</sup>	Documentary: <i>Waging a Living: Working Overtime in Pursuit of the Elusive American Dream</i>	IR, Ch. 16 (Newman and Chen)
Wednesday, October 15 <sup>th</sup>	Education and the Myth of Meritocracy	IR, Ch. 31 (Steele); Ch. 59 (Macleod)

Monday, October 20 <sup>th</sup>	Family, Social (Im)mobility, and the Reproduction of Inequality	<i>IR</i> , Ch. 54 (Jonsson et al.); Ch. 68 (Lareau)
Wednesday, October 22 <sup>nd</sup>	The Persistence of Gender Inequality	<i>IR</i> , Ch. 42 (Correll et al.); Ch. 45 (Jacobs)
Monday, October 27 <sup>th</sup>	Documentary: <i>Miss Representation</i>	No Reading; <b>Theories of Inequality Paper Due</b>
Wednesday, October 29 <sup>th</sup>	The Persistence of Racial Inequality	<i>IR</i> , Ch. 28 (Bertrand and Mullainathan); Ch. 30 (Feagin)
Monday, November 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Geography and Neighborhood Effects	<i>IR</i> , Ch. 19 (Massey and Denton)
Wednesday, November 5 <sup>th</sup>	Crime, Incarceration, and Inequality	<i>IR</i> , Ch. 22 (Western); Ch. 29 (Pager)
Monday, November 10 <sup>th</sup>	The Social Patterning of Health	<i>IR</i> , Ch. 65 (Scott); Ch. 66 (Mullahy et al.)
Wednesday, November 12 <sup>th</sup>	Globalization and Inequality	<i>IR</i> , Ch. 49 (Hochschild); Ch. 71 (Firebaugh)
Monday, November 17 <sup>th</sup>	Political Solutions for Inequality: Poverty and Welfare	<i>IR</i> , Ch. 17 (Smeeding); Ch. 21 (Hays)
Wednesday, November 19 <sup>th</sup>	Political Solutions for Inequality: Unions and Taxation	<i>IR</i> , Ch. 72 (Rosenfeld); Ch. 78 (Frank)
Monday, November 24 <sup>th</sup>	<b>EXAM #2</b>	None
Wednesday, November 26 <sup>th</sup>	NO CLASS Thanksgiving	None
Monday, December 1 <sup>st</sup>	Axes of Inequality Presentations, Groups 1-3	None
Wednesday, December 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Axes of Inequality Presentations, Groups 4-6	None
Monday, December 8 <sup>th</sup>	Axes of Inequality Presentations, Groups 7-9	None
Wednesday, December 10 <sup>th</sup>	Course Conclusion	<b>Axes of Inequality Paper Due</b>

### **Additional Course Policies:**

#### *Classroom Conduct*

Please be respectful towards me and your fellow classmates. This precludes arriving to class late, leaving in the middle of class, chatting with others, passing notes, sleeping, texting, etc. Laptop computers are allowed in class *for note-taking purposes only*. The use of computers or cell phones for any other purpose is a distraction to me and the other students. I will therefore ask you to leave class if you are found to be using any electronic device for anything other than note taking. Lectures may be recorded only with my prior permission.

### *Office Hours*

I hold regularly scheduled office hours and welcome the opportunity to speak with students one-on-one. I strongly encourage you to drop by and discuss the course and other academic issues. I recognize that many of you may not be available during my regularly scheduled office hours. If that is the case for you, please e-mail me to schedule another meeting time and list several dates/times that you can meet so that we can schedule an alternative time that works for us both.

### *E-mail*

I strive to be as responsive as possible to student email during business hours. If you e-mail me during the week, you can expect a response within 24 hours. If you send me a message on the weekend, I will respond on Monday. I will adhere to professional standards of written correspondence in my email communication with you. Please extend the same courtesy to me by using a proper salutation and professional language, tone, and style, including proper grammar and spelling.

### *Syllabus Modifications*

I have tried to outline the course to the best of my ability in this syllabus prior to the beginning of the term. That said, I reserve the right to modify the syllabus if the need arises. If I do so, I will notify you immediately of any changes with the goal of maintaining clear expectations about course requirements and policies.

### **University Policies:**

Refer to the University Catalog or Schedule of Courses for more information.

### *Students with Disabilities*

“Upon identifying themselves to the instructor and the University, students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodation for learning and evaluation. For more information, contact Services to Students with Disabilities in the Henry Madden Library, Room 1202 (278-2811).”

### *Honor Code*

“Members of the CSU Fresno academic community adhere to principles of academic integrity and mutual respect while engaged in university work and related activities. You should:

- a) understand or seek clarification about expectations for academic integrity in this course (including no cheating, plagiarism and inappropriate collaboration)
- b) neither give nor receive unauthorized aid on examinations or other course work that is used by the instructor as the basis of grading.
- c) take responsibility to monitor academic dishonesty in any form and to report it to the instructor or other appropriate official for action.”

### *Cheating and Plagiarism*

“Cheating is the actual or attempted practice of fraudulent or deceptive acts for the purpose of improving one's grade or obtaining course credit; such acts also include assisting another student to do so. Typically, such acts occur in relation to examinations. However, it is the intent of this definition that the term 'cheating' not be limited to examination situations only, but that it include any and all actions by a student that are intended to gain an unearned academic advantage by fraudulent or deceptive means. Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating which consists of the misuse of the published and/or unpublished works of others by misrepresenting the material (i.e., their intellectual property) so used as one's own work.”

Penalties for cheating and plagiarism range from a 0 or F on a particular assignment, through an F for the course, to expulsion from the University. For more information on the University's policy regarding cheating and plagiarism, refer to the Class Schedule (Legal Notices on Cheating and Plagiarism) or the University Catalog (Policies and Regulations).”

### *Computers*

“At CSU Fresno, computers and communications links to remote resources are recognized as being integral to the education and research experience. Every student is required to have his/her own computer or have other personal access to a workstation (including a modem and a printer) with all the recommended software. The minimum and recommended standards for the workstations and software, which may vary by academic major, are updated periodically and are available from Information Technology Services (<http://www.csufresno.edu/ITS/>) or the University Bookstore. In the curriculum and class assignments, students are presumed to have 24-hour access to a computer workstation and the necessary communication links to the University's information resources.”

### *Disruptive Classroom Behavior*

“The classroom is a special environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and growth. It is essential to this learning environment that respect for the rights of others seeking to learn, respect for the professionalism of the instructor, and the general goals of academic freedom are maintained....Differences of viewpoint or concerns should be expressed in terms which are supportive of the learning process, creating an environment in which students and faculty may learn to reason with clarity and compassion, to share of themselves without losing their identities, and to develop an understanding of the community in which they live.... Student conduct which disrupts the learning process shall not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action and/or removal from class.”

### *Copyright Policy*

“Copyright laws and fair use policies protect the rights of those who have produced the material. The copy in this course has been provided for private study, scholarship, or research. Other uses may require permission from the copyright holder. The user of this work is responsible for adhering to copyright law of the U.S. (Title 17, U.S. Code). To help you familiarize yourself

with copyright and fair use policies, the University encourages you to visit its copyright web page: <http://www.csufresno.edu/library/about/policies/docs/copyrtpolicyfull.pdf>.

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