

ONLINE

Social Inequality

SOCI 0308.001

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Description and Objectives: This course will offer sociological perspectives on economic inequality and the intersecting social constructions of racial, ethnic, gender inequality. American structures of social inequality--both affluent culture and the urban underclass with its culture of poverty--are our main geographical boundary. However, we will examine issues of poverty and the political process of defining the interests and needs of minority groups comparatively, bringing to light some divergent trends in Western European countries, as well as global trends newly industrializing and third world nations. While the fundamental division between “the haves” and the “have-nots,” and the expansion of this gap in the 21st Century is a pivotal focus in this course, we will also approach the issue of economic inequality with a political lens, to reveal the often neglected links between inequality and political institutions. One key objective in the course will be to show how disadvantaged groups are socially excluded from democratic participation in need articulation and begin to consider social policy approaches to social and political inclusion. We will sample classical and contemporary theoretical work on class, class conflict and social stratification. The recent, practical insights into how capitalism works in American Society offered by Erik Olin Wright and Joel Rogers will be a particularly influential resource as we broadly examine the dynamic of class, consumerism, corporate power and labor markets, inequalities in healthcare, environmental issues and additional public goods. We will also grapple with the insights on racial stratification in the urban ghetto offered by William J. Wilson and Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, and in the American news media by Martin Gilens. We will draw on a collection of articles in The New York Times Editorial Series, *The Great Divide*, as primers for discussion of such contemporary themes in American society as mixed and integrated public education, inequality in higher educational opportunity, the feminization of poverty, feminism and women’s work. The guiding aim of this series is to “undermine the notion that there are no truly fundamental laws of capitalism.” This series should help all to build the critical capacity and employ the new sociological tools to conceptualize more democratic approaches to social change aimed at reducing inequality.

Assignments Overview: All participations will be expected to produce a podcast presentation, write 3 reflection papers contribute to WIKIS and Discussion Boards as well as preparing for 3 multiple choice quizzes, a midterm and a final exam.

Textbooks: ([Available for order at the Westfield State University Bookstore](#))

- [Erik Olin Wright and Joel Rogers, American Society: How it Really Works, W.W. Norton, 2011](#)
- [Selected Articles in Jeff Manza and Michael Sauder, Inequality and Society: Social Science Perspectives on Social Stratification, W.W. Norton, 2011](#)