

**Professor Ted Gerber**

**Office Hours: Wednesday 2-4, or by appointment**

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“Social stratification” refers to the fact that society is divided into unequal groups. Sociologists, social critics, policy makers, and public activists have long been concerned with what types of inequalities exist in society, how they are generated, and what consequences they bear. Inequality is a large topic encompassing complex theories and methodologies. It is also a dynamic area of sociological research, since systems of inequality change over time due to changes in the economy, in social policies, and in attitudes. We will examine selected issues in the sociology of social inequality through lectures, reading of original theoretical and empirical works, and class discussions. We will also learn how the topics and readings we cover in class are related to current events and issues through group reports and through several films.

The course proceeds through four phases (though there is some overlap). First, we consider theories, issues, and answers relating to the question "who gets what?" We will consider general theories of stratification (both classical theories and more recent varieties). Then, we take a broad look at social class and inequality in the United States. We will see how levels of inequality have changed over time, consider different explanations of what produces inequality in the United States, and examine some of the consequences of inequality in our society.

Next we look at "ascriptive processes," i.e., the inequalities associated with race, ethnicity, and gender. We study trends in the size of these types of inequalities and consider diverse explanations of why they come about and how they change and do not change. We will delve deeply into such topics as the growth of the African American middle class and the impact of changing gender roles at work on family arrangements. Finally, we will examine how the changing economic context has shaped the contours of stratification in the last decade or so. Recent developments such as the globalization of the economy, the rise in corporate "downsizing," and the attack on the welfare state all have consequences for stratification that we must trace.

The study of social stratification has been at the center of sociological inquiry since the time of origin. Equally important, the high visibility in the public consciousness of issues such as the “Bell Curve” controversy, Affirmative Action, welfare reform, and the impact of downsizing show that social stratification remains an important problem and concern for our society. Through the scientific study of stratification processes sociologists can contribute to thoughtful discussions of these pressing issues. This course is intended to fortify students' understanding of socio-economic inequalities in the United States with the insights provided by sociological research.

## **Format**

Class will consist of lectures, small group discussions, and large group discussions. Attendance is mandatory and part of your grade will be based on participation in small and large group discussions. You will also present group reports on current events related to the course. I will provide more information about my expectations for participation and reports. Finally, the class will include several video showings, to be held at 5:30 pm on the following Thursdays: September 13 and October 4. Attendance at these showings is not mandatory, but you must view the videos, as they will be covered on exams. They are all available through the university library, should you wish to view them on your own. Lecture outlines will be made available on a course website, which you can access through: <https://uwmad.courses.wisconsin.edu/>.

## **Requirements for Undergraduates**

1) *Reading Quizzes.* Six quizzes on the readings will be given at the start of class on the scheduled days. Quizzes will be open-note, closed-book. I will hand out study guides to help you understand the reading and prepare for the quizzes. Each quiz will be worth 3 points. I will drop your lowest quiz grade at the end of the semester, so the quizzes will make up 15 points total – i.e., 15% of your overall grade. There will be no make-ups.

2) *Take-home Writing Assignments.* You will have four take-home writing assignments over the course of the semester. They will be essay exams (4-5 pages) based on lecture materials, readings, and videos. They will be due on the following days, so make sure you plan ahead: September 18, October 16, November 27, and December 20. They are each worth 15 points, so overall, the writing assignments will be worth 60% of your grade.

3) *Group reports.* You will be assigned to teams of three or four. At one time during the semester, your group will make a brief report to the class about a news story (from the *New York Times*) that is relevant to course materials. You will submit a 1-2 page written synopsis of your report. I will give you more information about this assignment after the first week of class. The group report is worth 10% of your grade.

4) *Class participation.* Your attendance and participation in small and large group discussions will count for the remaining 15% of your grade.

## **Requirements for Graduate Students**

Graduate students will participate in group reports and in class (requirements 3 and 4 above). However, in lieu of reading quizzes and take-home writing assignments, graduate students must submit reading reviews on September 27, October 25, November 20, and December 13. These reviews should briefly summarize the assigned readings, discuss the general issues and themes raised, and critically analyze the arguments. Graduate students must also submit a seminar paper (15-20 pp.) no later than December 21. The paper can be an extended review essay or an original research paper. Be sure to discuss your topic with me by November 1.



**Texts (available for purchase at the University Bookstore):**

- Claude S. Fischer et. al. 1996. *Inequality By Design*. Princeton University Press.  
Mary Patillo-McCoy. 2000. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class*. University of Chicago Press.  
Phyllis Moen and Patricia Roehling. 2005. *The Career Mystique: Cracks in the American Dream*. Rowman and Littlefield.  
Thomas M. Shapiro (editor). 2005. *Great Divides: Readings in Social Inequality in the United States*. Third Edition. McGraw Hill.  
Joseph E. Stiglitz. 2003. *Globalization and Its Discontents*. WW Norton.

**SCHEDULE**

**Week 1 (Sep 4/6): Theory—Functionalist and Marxist Analyses of Inequality**

Sep 4 Introduction

Sep 6 READ BY TODAY: Shapiro (GD 1-9), Davis and Moore (GD 76-84),  
Gans (GD 85-94), Marx and Engels (GD 36-42)

**Week 2 (Sep 11/13): Theory—Weberian and Elite Theory, Neo-Marxism**

Sep 11 READ BY TODAY: Weber (GD 43-53), Mills (GD 139-46),  
Domhoff (GD 156-64), Wright (GD 96-111)

*Reading Quiz # 1*

Sep 13 Assignment # 1 distributed, due Sep 18 in class

**Video showing:** *Roger and Me*, 5:30 pm, Room TBA

**Week 3 (Sep 18/20): Theory—Elite Theories, Neo-Marxism**

Sep 18 Assignment # 1 DUE TODAY

Sep 20 No class

**Week 4 (Sep 25/27): Social Class and Inequality in the US: Trends, Mechanisms, Consequences**

Sep 25 READ BY TODAY: Zinn and Eitzen (GD 16-19), Levy (GD 19-22),  
Keister (GD 26-33), Reiman (GD 146-55),  
Edin and Lein (GD 173-85)

*Reading Quiz # 2*

Sep 27 Group Reports, groups 1 and 2

**Week 5 (Oct 2/4): Social Class and Inequality in the US (cont.)**

Oct 2 READ BY TODAY: MacLeod (GD 22-26), Turner (GD 71-76),  
Cookson and Persell (GD 380-91), Kozol (GD 392-410)

Oct 4 Group Reports, Groups 3 and 4

**Video Showing.** *People Like Me: Social Class in America*, 5:30 pm, room TBA

**Week 6 (Oct 9/11): Social Class and Inequality in the US (cont.)**

Oct 9 READ BY TODAY: *Inequality by Design*, chs. 1, 4-6

*Reading Quiz # 3*

Oct 11 *Take-home assignment #2 distributed, due Oct 16*

**Week 7 (Oct 16/18): Racial and Ethnic Inequalities**

***Oct 16 Assignment #2 DUE TODAY***

Oct 18 READ BY TODAY: Bonacich (GD 57-70), DuBois (GD 188-93),  
Takaki (GD 213-23)

**Week 8 (Oct 23/25): Racial and Ethnic Inequalities (cont.)**

Oct 23 READ BY TODAY: Anderson (GD 207-13), Massey and Denton (GD 235-51),  
Anderson (GD 264-70), Wilson (GD 284-90),  
*Inequality By Design*, chapter 8

Oct 25 Group Reports, Groups 5 and 6

**Week 9 (Oct 30/Nov 1): Racial and Ethnic Inequalities (cont.)**

Oct 30 READ BY TODAY: *Black Picket Fences* (all)  
*Reading Quiz #4*

**Week 10 (Nov 6/8): Gender Inequalities**

Nov 6 READ BY TODAY: Hartmann (GD 53-7), Risman (GD 292-300),  
Higginbotham (GD 345-54),  
Reskin and Padavic (GD 66-77)

Nov 8 Group Reports, Groups 7 and 8

**Week 11 (Nov 13/15): Gender Inequalities (cont.)**

Nov 13 READ BY TODAY: *The Career Mystique* (all)  
*Reading Quiz # 5*

Nov 15 Group Reports, Groups 9 and 10

**Week 12 (Nov 20/22): Gender Inequalities (cont.)**

*Nov 20 Take-home Assignment #3 handed out, due Nov 27*

*Nov 22 Thanksgiving: No Class*

**Week 13 (Nov 27/29): Inequality in the New Global Economy**

***Nov 27 Assignment #3 DUE TODAY***

Nov 29 READ BY TODAY: Barnet and Cavanagh (GD 112-21), Laws (GD 121-32),  
Massey et al. (GD 132-8)

**Week 14 (Dec 4/6): Inequality in the New Global Economy (cont.)**

Dec 4 READ BY TODAY: *Globalization and Its Discontents*, chs. 1-3, 5-7  
*Reading Quiz # 6*

Dec 6 Group Reports, Groups 11 and 12

**Week 15 (Dec 11/13): Review and Conclude**

*Dec 13 Take-home Assignment #4 handed out, due December 20 by 5:00 pm.*