

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Sociology 110A—Fall 2011
Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday 8-8:50am
Maxey 206

Instructor: Brooke Neely

Office: Maxey 325

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11am & by appointment

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Course Description and Purpose

With this course, you are invited to put on your sociological cap and explore a collection of key issues facing our society today. To this end, we will address the following questions:

- What does it mean to study social problems from a sociological perspective? How are the individual experiences of people connected to broader social and historical forces?
- How do social inequalities get organized? How do race, class, gender, and sexuality shape our experiences and social life more generally?

In our exploration of these questions, we will study central sociological concepts that help us understand society and social problems. We will then utilize these concepts as we read a collection of case studies. Throughout the course, you will work to expand your critical thinking and reflection skills, make meaningful connections between sociological ideas and everyday experience, and better understand how your personal life experience interacts with larger social and historical forces. This course will force us to confront some ugly and painful dimensions of social life and history. But by engaging directly with these issues, we can imagine what a just and equal social world should look like and how we might contribute to making it a reality.

Required Readings

All books are available at the bookstore and on reserve in Penrose library. **Other assigned readings will be available on the CLEo site for Soc 110.**

- Ehrenreich, Barbara. 2001. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. New York: Holt Paperbacks.
- Katz, Jackson. 2006. *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks.
- Kozol, Jonathan. 2005. *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Schlosser, Eric. 2002. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. New York: Harper Perennial.

CLEo Course Site: Important course information, including some assigned readings, will be posted here. To access the site, go to <https://cleo.whitman.edu/portal>, type in your Whitman email ID and password, and click on Soc 110A F11 tab in the upper right. Readings will be located under “Resources,” and assignments under “Assignments.”

Course Expectations and Organization

Your active participation in this course is my primary expectation. You will learn much more and earn a higher grade if you remain actively involved. This includes coming to every class, engaging and participating during our class meetings, working collaboratively with your classmates, completing the reading assignments and written work by their due dates, bringing your books/readings to class, visiting my office hours when you have questions and/or concerns, investing yourself fully in the assignments, and keeping an open mind as we proceed through the course. Class meetings will consist of mini-lectures, discussions, small-group work, media presentations, and other activities. You are responsible for staying up-to-date on all course material. This syllabus is our contract and signifies your and my commitment to meeting these expectations.

Office Hours I welcome visitors! Please stop by for any reason, course-related or otherwise. One-on-one discussion of the material helps considerably and most likely will improve your grade. If you cannot make my scheduled office hours, please contact me to make an appointment at another time.

Email Please email me if you have any questions and/or concerns about course material or assignments. I may not always check email in the evenings or over the weekend. Also, I will send course updates occasionally via the course list serve, so please be sure to *check your campus email regularly*.

Classroom Environment I very much look forward to the discussions we will have in this class, and I encourage honest dialogue and comments from everyone. As we do so, however, I expect you all to be respectful of your classmates' thoughts and feelings even if you disagree with one another. And please keep your comments succinct, insightful, and always intellectually connected to readings or previous discussions. Also, please turn off your cell phones and laptop computers in class.

Course Feedback I welcome comments and suggestions from you as we proceed with this class. While I cannot accommodate every request, I will take each into consideration. I will solicit feedback occasionally during the course, and if you have thoughts about how to improve or modify course organization, please be in touch with me.

Students with Disabilities If you are a student with a disability who will need accommodations in this course, please meet with Julia Dunn in the Academic Resource Center (Mem. 205, x5213, dunnjl@whitman.edu) for assistance in developing a plan to meet your academic needs.

Course Requirements

In-Class Participation (15%) Participation includes attending class, demonstrating you have completed the assigned readings, and engaging in class discussions, discussion groups, in-class writing, and other activities. I take attendance the first week of class and on an if needed basis afterward. Class discussions are an integral part of this course, so you cannot make up a missed class by simply copying notes from a classmate. Also, assignment updates and details will be discussed in class. If you must miss class, please talk to your classmates first and then see me for clarification and/or more details. Finally, please come to class on time, and be sure to turn off your cell phone and laptop computer.

Discussion Leading (20%) Groups of 4 students will be formed the first week of class. These groups will meet throughout the semester to discuss the readings for that day. You will lead the discussion group **two** times, and turn in a brief outline and reflection on the days you lead. More detailed prompt to follow.

Sociological Imagination Assignments (20%; 10% each) You will write **two** 3-4 page papers for this course. These papers will give you a chance to utilize the principles of the sociological imagination and draw upon course content, first by applying them to your own life experience and second by applying them to a current event of your choosing. More detailed prompt to follow.

1st Paper Due: **Thursday, September 22**

2nd Paper Due: **Tuesday, November 1**

Midterm (15%) This exam will require you to utilize course concepts in short essay form. Rather than an exhaustive exam on the content of the first half of the course, the midterm will require you to make a clear argument and draw connections between relevant course ideas. More detailed expectations will be discussed in class. Date: **Thursday, October 13.**

Group Research Project (30%) You will work with your discussion group on a research project this semester, which will culminate in an 18-20-page paper and 15-20 minute class presentation. The presentations will happen in the last two weeks of the semester. The final paper is due **Friday, December 9.** For this project, you will describe and analyze a specific social problem of your group's choosing. Your group will submit a 1-2 page research project proposal on **Tuesday, October 4.** In this proposal, you must lay out your research topic, your plans for conducting the research, and a list of possible sources. ****You must** then set up a meeting with me as a group to discuss your plans for the project, sign-up for a presentation time, and receive feedback from me.** More detailed prompt to follow.

Grades will be determined as follows:

93-100 = A

90-92.9 = A-

88-89.9 = B+

83-87.9 = B

80-82.9 = B-

78-79.9 = C+

73-77.9 = C

70-72.9 = C-

60-69.9 = D

59.9 and below = F

Late Assignments All written assignments are due in class on the date indicated on the syllabus. *I do not accept emailed papers.* Late work will not be accepted unless there are college-approved reasons for the delay. You must talk with me before the due date of an assignment to have a college-approved extension considered. For all other late work, 2% of the assignment grade will be taken off each day the paper is late, beginning just after the due date and time. Please contact me if you have problems turning in your assignments. I am more likely to understand if I have heard from you before the due date. Be sure to back-up all of your work electronically and retain copies of your graded assignments.

Style and Organization For your written assignments, I expect that in addition to conveying substantive ideas, you will write clearly and organize your paper effectively. This includes presenting and supporting a main argument, using an introduction and conclusion, smoothly integrating outside sources into your own ideas, constructing clear sentences and avoiding grammatical errors, and

attaching a bibliography to your paper. Please contact me for assistance with your writing. You may also visit the Writing Center in Olin 223.

Format Please use 12-point font with 1-inch margins, double-spaced text, and page numbers. Be sure to cite sources using American Sociological Association style. If you are unsure of ASA style, please check out this website: www.calstatela.edu/library/bi/rsalina/asa.styleguide.html.

Academic Honesty Be sure to follow Whitman's policies on academic honesty and plagiarism. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, or are unsure about how to properly cite sources, please see me. You may also check here: www.whitman.edu/content/academic_resources/handbooks/student_handbook/plagiarism-policy.

Course Schedule

Readings must be completed by the day they are assigned. ***I will do my best to abide by this schedule, but it is subject to change. I will announce changes in-class, and it is your responsibility to remain up-to-date on course assignments, requirements, and in-class announcements.***

Week 1 Course Introduction

Tuesday, August 30 Course introduction and syllabus

Wednesday, August 31 Class activity

Thursday, September 1

Giddens, Anthony, Mitchell Dunier, Richard Appelbaum, and Deborah Carr. 2009. "What is Sociology?" From *Introduction to Sociology*, 7th edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Co, p. 3-25.

C. Wright Mills "The Sociological Imagination": www.lclark.edu/~goldman/socimagination.html

Week 2 Social Inequalities across Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality

Tuesday, September 6

Anderson, Margaret and Patricia Hill Collins. 2007. "Why Race, Class, and Gender Still Matter." From *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth Press, p. 1-16.

Tavernise, Sabrina. 2011. "Recession Study Finds Hispanics Hit the Hardest." *New York Times*.

Wednesday, September 7

Scott, Janny and David Leonhardt. 2005. "Shadowy Lines that Still Divide," "How Class Works," and "Where Do You Fit In?" From *The New York Times*.

Film: *People Like Us*

Thursday, September 8

Discuss the film and the readings for the week.

Week 3 Social Inequalities across Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality

Tuesday, September 13

Camara Phyllis Jones. 2000. "Levels of Racism: A Theoretical Framework and a Gardener's Tale" <http://www.cahealthadvocates.org/pdf/news/2007/Levels-Of-Racism.pdf>

Peggy McIntosh. 1990. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" http://livingroutes.org/unpacking_knapsack.pdf

Robert Jensen. 1998. "White Privilege Shapes the U.S." <http://www.princeton.edu/~ccameron/KoreaIIE/IIE337/CaseClass22.Jensen.pdf>

Eitzen, D. Stanley, Maxine Baca Zinn, and Kelly Eitzen Smith. 2011. "Gender Inequality" and "Sexual Orientation." From *Social Problems*, 12th edition. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p. 240-244, 252-272, 273-295.

Group Discussion

Wednesday, September 14

½ of class Library Research Day—**Meet in Maxey computer lab (109)**

Thursday, September 15

½ of class Library Research Day—**Meet in Maxey computer lab (109)**

Week 4 Social Inequalities and Hurricane Katrina

Tuesday, September 20

Jason DeParle. 2005. "What Happens to a Race Deferred." From The New York *Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/04/weekinreview/04depa.html>

Neil Smith. 2006. "There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster" <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Smith/>

Susan Cutter. 2006. "The Geography of Social Vulnerability: Race, Class, and Catastrophe" <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Cutter/>

Film: *Coming Home: The Dry Storm*

Wednesday, September 21

Film: *Coming Home*

Thursday, September 22

Discuss *Coming Home* and readings for the week

****Sociological Imagination Paper #1 Due****

Week 5 Education and Inequality

Tuesday, September 27

The Shame of the Nation Introduction, Ch. 1-2 (p. 1-62)

Group discussion

Wednesday, September 28

The Shame of the Nation Ch. 3-4 (p. 63-108)

Thursday, September 29

The Shame of the Nation Ch. 5-7 (p. 109-186)

Group discussion

Week 6 Education and Inequality

Tuesday, October 4

The Shame of the Nation Ch. 8-Epilogue (p. 187-317)

Film: *Waiting for Superman*

****Group Research Project Summary Due****

Wednesday, October 5

Film: *Waiting for Superman*

Thursday, October 6

Discuss *Waiting for Superman* and *The Shame of the Nation*

Week 7

Tuesday, October 11 NO CLASS—FALL BREAK

Wednesday, October 12 Midterm review

Thursday, October 13 MIDTERM

Week 8 Labor and Well-Being

Tuesday, October 18

Nickel and Dimed Introduction-Ch. 1 (p. 1-50)

Group discussion

Wednesday, October 19

Nickel and Dimed Ch. 2 (p. 51-120)

Thursday, October 20

Nickel and Dimed Ch. 3-Evaluation (p. 121-222)

Group discussion

Week 9 Food and the Environment

Tuesday, October 25

Fast Food Nation Introduction-Ch. 2 (p. 1-57)

Film: *Fast Food Women*

Wednesday, October 26

Fast Food Nation Ch. 3-4 (p. 59-107)

Group discussion

Thursday, October 27

Fast Food Nation Ch. 5-8 (p. 111-190)

Week 10 Food and the Environment

Tuesday, November 1

Fast Food Nation Ch. 9-Epilogue (p. 193-270)

Film: *Food, Inc.*

****Sociological Imagination Paper #2 Due****

Wednesday, November 2

Film: *Food, Inc.*

Thursday, November 3

Discuss *Food, Inc.* and *Fast Food Nation*

Week 11 Gendered Violence

Tuesday, November 8

Macho Paradox Preface, Ch. 1-3 (p. 1-57)

Group discussion

Wednesday, November 9

Macho Paradox Ch. 4-5 (p. 59-89)

Thursday, November 10

Macho Paradox Ch. 6-8 (p. 91-148)

Group discussion

Week 12 Gendered Violence

Tuesday, November 15

Macho Paradox Ch. 9-13 (p. 149-270)

Film: *Tough Guise*

Wednesday, November 16

Film: *Tough Guise*

Thursday, November 17

Discuss *Tough Guise* and *Macho Paradox*

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 21-25: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 13

Tuesday, November 29 Student Presentations

Wednesday, November 30 Student Presentations

Thursday, December 1 Student Presentations

Week 14

Tuesday, December 6 Student Presentations

Wednesday, December 7 Student Presentations

Thursday, December 8 Student Presentations and evaluations

****Final project due Friday, December 9 by 4pm at my office.****