

Sociology 130AC Spring 2025 Social Inequalities, American Cultures

Tu./Th. 3:30-5:00pm, 159 Mulford Hall

Instructor: Joanna Reed, Ph.D., joannareed@berkeley.edu, 419 Social Sciences Building

Office hours: Tuesdays, 9:30-11:00am appointments, in-person (419 SSB) or remote. Drop-in from 11:00-11:30am. Sign-up here: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/bbntp>

[Links to an external site.](#)

Course Description:

This course offers a systematic introduction to exploring the causes, consequences and extent of economic and other social inequalities in the U.S. as understood by sociologists. We begin by discussing theories and concepts that scholars use to understand different forms of inequality and how these are maintained and reproduced. This first part of the course will focus on answering the following questions: What social categories are most meaningful for explaining contemporary U.S. inequalities? How are these categories stratified, how are people assigned to them, and how are resources distributed across these categories? The second part of the course is devoted to providing a glimpse into how inequalities “work” in practice. We will do this by examining institutions central to generating and sustaining inequalities in the contemporary United States and the connections between them: families, neighborhoods, education, labor markets and incarceration. Within each domain, we will pay special attention to the significance of social class, race and ethnicity and gender and how they combine to produce different outcomes and consequences for individuals and social groups.

Goals for the course:

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

- Understand and explain sociological perspectives for how and why people are classified into social categories, and the social categories most consequential for explaining contemporary social inequalities.
- Understand and explain the role of institutions like the government and public policy, family, neighborhoods, education, labor markets, and incarceration in structuring contemporary social inequalities.

-Apply this knowledge to understanding and contextualizing current events and debates centered around social inequalities, and to your own position in different systems of inequalities.

-Discuss some theoretically and empirically grounded ideas for what might shift current patterns of inequality.

-Gain exposure to working with Census data and an introduction to observational fieldwork through the neighborhood project.

You are used to academic challenges. This course may also be challenging in other ways that will vary depending on your life experiences and identities.

The material may challenge some of your common-sense understandings of social inequalities and lead you to confront your own, and your family's, place in the U.S. stratification system. For some students, being in this course is the first time they recognize the depth of their own disadvantages or the extent of their privilege, which may lead to discomfort.

Your personal experiences may not fit the social patterns presented in class or in the readings. This is an opportunity for learning and exploration.

We will be frankly discussing controversial topics in class. You are likely to encounter viewpoints that challenge your own or that you perceive as ignorant and hear opinions that you disagree with. It is crucial that we strive to maintain an atmosphere of open-mindedness and respect for each other's perspectives and experiences. Please respect each other and the class by asking questions and making critiques that are *grounded in class topics and materials*, and by being tactful and polite. Think before you speak and consider how your position may sound to others. Respond to *ideas* rather than personally attacking or labeling the *person* expressing them.

Evaluation:

Reading Quizzes: 10% of grade

In-Class Participation: 5% of grade

Take-Home Exam 1: 20% of grade

In-Class Exam 2: 20% of grade

Neighborhoods and Social Environments Project: 25% of grade

-Fieldwork (10%)

- Paper (15%)

Take-Home Final Exam: 20% of grade

Course Schedule*:

Part I: Understanding Social Inequalities

Week 1: Jan. 21, 23: A portrait of extremes: life at the bottom and top of the income scale

Readings: Edin, K. & Shaefer, L. (2015) *\$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Introduction [Edin & Shaefer_Introduction.pdf](#)

and Ch. 4 "By Any Means Necessary" [Edin & Shaefer-Ch.4.pdf](#)

Sherman, R. (2017) *Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1, pp 1-57 [Sherman.pdf](#)

Week 2: Jan. 28, 30: Foundational Theories of Inequality and Stratification

Readings: Marx, K. "Classes in Capitalism and Pre-Capitalism" in Eds. Grusky, D. & Szelenyi, S. *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class and Gender* (2007), pp. 32-43. Westview Press: Boulder, CO [Marx&WeberReading.pdf](#)

Weber, M. "Class, Status and Party" in Eds. Grusky, D. & Szelenyi, S. *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class and Gender* (2007), pp. 32-43. Westview Press: Boulder, CO [Marx&WeberReading.pdf](#)

DuBois, W.E.B. (1897) "The Strivings of the Negro People". *The Atlantic Monthly* [DuBois_"Strivings"_1897.pdf](#)

(modern version) [DuBois_"Strivings".pdf](#)

Week 3: Feb. 4, 6: Foundational Theories: How are they useful today?

Reading Quiz 1 released on Feb. 6th after class, due before class on Feb. 11th.

Readings: Burrell, J. & Fourcade, M. (2021) "The Society of Algorithms". *Annual Review of Sociology*, 47:213-37 [Burrell & Forcade Algorithms.pdf](#)

Gilbert, D. (2011). "Social Class in America". In *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality*. Pp. 1-19. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, Sage Publications [Gilbert\(full\).pdf](#)

Collins, P. & Bilge, S. (2016) *Intersectionality*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. Ch. 1 “What Is Intersectionality?” [Collins & Bilge.pdf](#)

Week 4: Feb. 11, 13: More Theories of Inequality and Stratification: Building on Foundations

Questions for Take-Home Exam 1 released on Feb. 13th.

Readings: Bourdieu, P. (1986) “The Forms of Capital” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Ed. J. Richardson, pp. 241-258. New York: Greenwood [Bourdieu_forms_of_capital.pdf](#)

(we will be continuing our discussion of this reading in Week 4)

Lareau, A. (2003) *Unequal Childhoods*. University of California Press. Ch. 1 and Appendix B: Understanding the Work of Pierre Bourdieu [Lareau_Ch1_Appendix.pdf](#)

Blau & Duncan (1967) “The Process of Stratification”. in Eds. Grusky, D. & Szelenyi, S. *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class and Gender* (2007), pp. 32-43. Westview Press: Boulder, CO (Note: don’t worry if you don’t understand the math.) [Blau & Duncan.pdf](#)

Recommended: Hout, M. (2019) “Social Mobility” and Percheski, C. (2019) “Income Inequality” in *Pathways, State of the Union 2019*. Stanford Center for the Study of Poverty and Inequality. (two separate short articles) [Hout_Pathways2019.pdf](#)

, [Percheski_Pathways2019.pdf](#) 

Week 5: Feb. 18, 20: Focusing on Gender Inequality

Take- Home Exam 1 due on Feb. 20. No Lecture on Feb. 20th.

Readings: Lorber, J. (2022) *The New Gender Paradox*. Polity Press. Introduction, Ch. 1, 2, 3 [Lorber_NewGenderParadox.pdf](#)


Recommended: Ridgeway, C. (2011). *Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 2 & 3 [Ridgeway_Ch2.pdf](#)

, [Ridgeway_Ch3.pdf](#) 

Week 6: Feb. 25, 27: Focusing on Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Readings: Roberts, D. (2011). *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics and Big Business Re-Create Race in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: The New Press. Ch. 1 “The Invention of Race” [Roberts.pdf](#)

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). *Racism Without Racists: Color Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the U.S.* Laham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Ch. 1 & 2 [Bonilla-Silva.pdf](#)

, [Bonilla-Silva_Ch2.pdf](#) 

Omi, M. & Winant, H. (1994) “Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s”, in Eds. Grusky, D. & Szelenyi, S. *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class and Gender* (2007), pp. 197-203. Westview Press: Boulder, CO [Omi&Winant.pdf](#)

Recommended: Massey, D. (2009). “Racial Formation in Theory and Practice: The Case of Mexicans in the U.S.” *Race and Social Problems*, 1:12-26 [Massey.pdf](#)

Week 7: Mar. 4, 6: Intersectional Inequalities

Reading Quiz 2 released on Mar. 6 after class, due before class on Mar. 11.

Readings: Foner, N. (2022) *One Quarter of the Nation*. Princeton University Press. Ch. 2 “The Racial Order” [Foner_Ch2.pdf](#)

Portes, A. & Zhou, M. (1993) “Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants”, in Eds. Grusky, D. & Szelenyi, S. *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class and Gender* (2007), pp. 208-220. Westview Press: Boulder, CO [Portes & Zhou.pdf](#)

Recommended:

Lee, J. & Zhou, M. (2014) “The Success Frame and Achievement Paradox: The Costs and Consequences for Asian Americans”. *Race and Social Problems*, Vol. 4, no. 4 [Lee & Zhou.pdf](#)

Zhou, M. & Gonzalez, R. (2019) “Divergent Destinies: Children of Immigrants Growing up in the United States”. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 45:383-99 [Zhou & Gonzalez 2019.pdf](#)

Week 8: Mar. 11, 13: Inequality, Politics and Policy

Readings: Hacker, J. & Pierson, P. (2010). *Winner Take All Politics*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Ch. 1 & 2 “How the Winner Take All Economy Was Made” [Hacker & Pierson.pdf](#)

Desmond, M. (2023) *Poverty, By America*. New York: Crown. Ch. 5 “How We Rely on Welfare” [Desmond_Ch5.pdf](#)

Case, A. & Deaton, A. (2020) *Deaths of Despair and the Future of American Capitalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Ch. 13 “How American Healthcare is Undermining Lives” [Case & Deaton.pdf](#)

Part 2: How Inequalities Work: Institutions and the Distribution of Resources

Week 9: Mar. 18, 20: Families and Family Structure

In-Class Exam 2 on Mar. 20, covering material from weeks 5-8.

Readings: Carlson, M. & England, P. (2011). “Social Class and Family Patterns in the United States”. In eds. Carlson, M. & England, P. *Social Class and Changing Families in an Unequal America*, pp. 1-9. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press [Carlson & England.pdf](#)

McLanahan, S. & Percheski, C. (2008). “Family Structure and the Reproduction of Inequalities”. *Annual Review of Sociology* 34: 257-74 [McLanahan& Percheski.pdf](#)

SPRING BREAK: MAR. 24-28

Week 10: Apr. 1, 3: Neighborhoods

Reading Quiz 3 released after class on Apr. 3, due before class on Apr. 8

Readings: “Neighborhoods Matter”. *Opportunity Insights*, Harvard University. Make sure to explore the “Opportunity Atlas” linked in the site.
<https://opportunityinsights.org/neighborhoods/>

[Links to an external site.](#)

Sharkey, P. (2013) *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Ch. 3 [SharkeyCh3.pdf](#)

Week 11: Apr. 8, 10: Education

Readings: Arum, R. & Roksa, J. (2014) *Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Ch. 1 “College and Emerging Adults” and 2 “Social and Academic Learning in College” [Arum & Roksa.pdf](#)

Mettler, S. (2014) *Degrees of Inequality: How the Politics of Higher Education Sabotaged the American Dream*. New York: Basic Books. Ch. 1 & 2 “Creating Degrees of Inequality” [Mettler.pdf](#)

and "Diminishing Returns: The Transformation of Federal Student Aid Over Time"

[Mettler_Ch.2.pdf](#)

Recommended: *The College Payoff*, The Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University [cew-college_payoff_2021-fr.pdf](#)

Carter, P. (2016) "Educational Equality is a Multifaceted Issue: Why We Must Understand the School's Sociocultural Context for Student Achievement." *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, Vol 2, No. 5, pp. 142-163 [Carter_P.pdf](#)

Week 12: Apr. 15, 17: Education/ Labor Markets

Reading Quiz 4 released on Apr. 17th, due before class on Apr. 22nd.

Readings: Kalleberg, A. (2011) *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Ch. 1, 2 [Kalleberg.pdf](#)

Week 13: Apr. 22, 24 : Labor Markets

Neighborhood and Social Environments Project due Apr. 24

Desmond, M. (2023) *Poverty, By America*. New York: Crown. Ch. 3 "How We Undercut Workers" [Desmond_Ch3.pdf](#)

England, P. (2005) "Gender Inequality in Labor Markets: The Role of Motherhood and Segregation". *Social Politics* 12.2:264-288 [England2005.pdf](#)

Recommended: Schor, J., Cansoy, M., Charles, W., Ladegaard, I., & Wengronowitz, R. (2019) "Dependence and Precarity in The Platform Economy". Boston College [Schor_etal_2019.pdf](#)

Week 14: Apr. 29, May 1: Mass Incarceration

Reading Quiz 5 (optional) released after class on May 1, due before 3:30pm on May 6th.

Readings: Wakefield, S. & Uggen, C. (2010) "Incarceration and Stratification". *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 36, pp. 387-406 [Wakefield&Uggen.pdf](#)

Western, B. (2018). *Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Ch. 1, 3, 11 [Western.pdf](#)

RRR Week: May 5-9

Take-Home Final Exam: deadline is Friday May 16th, 5pm.

The final exam will cover material from weeks 9-15.

***Course schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.**

Overview of assignments and academic expectations.

Reading Quizzes: The reading assignments form the backbone of our class. The quizzes will help you keep up with the reading as well as provide some benchmark of your comprehension. Quizzes are open-book and on bCourses. There will be 5 quizzes, each with 20-25 questions. Each quiz will be released after class on Thursday when a quiz is scheduled, and due the following Tuesday before class. You will have two chances to take the quiz, and the average of your two scores will be recorded. The average of your best 4 quiz scores will be used to calculate your final (cumulative) quiz grade. This means Quiz 5 is optional if you are happy with the cumulative average of the first 4 quizzes.

In-Class Participation: Your participation grade will be based on the completion of in-class activities that will be turned in on bCourses. These activities will not be announced in advance and may only be completed during class. Make sure to bring a device to class that enables you to access bCourses and type some sort of response. To allow for occasional absences, everyone will be allowed to miss two of these activities without any negative effects on their participation grade.

Exams: We will have two take-home essay exams and one in-class exam. The first exam, which is take-home, will focus on material through week 4. The second exam, which is in-class, will cover material from weeks 5-8. The final exam is take-home and will cover weeks 9 through 15. Questions for the take-home exams will be posted one week prior to the exam due date. You do not need to bring a blue/green book to the in-class exam.

Neighborhood and Social Environments Project: This project incorporates elements of fieldwork, working with census data and a written essay. The purpose is to explore how social inequalities are spatially distributed, and how places matter in creating social environments and context. All students will need to ride the AC transit #18 bus to complete the fieldwork portion of the assignment and will learn to access and interpret census data for the paper portion of the project. The full prompt and instructions are on bCourses. The paper itself will be evaluated with letter-based grading; the Fieldwork will be evaluated according to a contract-based system.

Expectations:

Reading: Much of the work of this class consists of keeping up with the class readings. All readings will be available to you through bCourses, but I strongly recommend purchasing a bound copy of course readings. Numerous studies have shown that we

retain material better when we read it offline and handwrite notes. Also, you don't need internet access or a functioning computer to do the reading and stay caught up.

For any given week, please read in the order listed on the syllabus. Readings are assigned for the week, rather than by the day, to allow for more flexibility in the class. That said, we will generally consider them sequentially. In general, try to complete the first reading before Monday's class, and everything before Friday. Links to readings can be found in the syllabus. Readings listed as "recommended" will not be included on exams.

Bound hard copies of course readings can be purchased at the Copy Central Store at 2411 Telegraph Ave. While not required, I strongly advise investing in your learning this semester by purchasing one.

Attendance: This is an in-person class and consistent attendance is a basic academic expectation. If you are not able, or not planning, to come to class regularly then please drop the class now. Throughout the semester we will have in-class participation activities and their completion will determine your participation grade.

Class Recordings and Slides: Class recordings are available to students who miss class due to an illness or emergency or are required to miss class due to university athletics. To gain access to the recordings you will need to email me explaining the reason for your absence, and the date that you missed. Make sure to let me know which class you are in, as I teach multiple lecture courses each semester. Recordings will be available for five days only. Lecture slides will be posted on bCourses before class in a folder in the "files" tab.

Grading Policies:

Readers: Graduate student Readers will do the bulk of the grading for this class. We will all work together to make sure the grading is as consistent and equitable as possible. During the second or third week of the semester, students will be assigned a Reader that will be their primary contact for dealing with administrative matters around DSP extensions, other extension requests and other administrative issues. This same person may grade all or some of your assignments.

Due dates and Grace Period: All assignments will have a due date, as usual. However, in the spirit of offering more flexibility to everyone, there will be a grace period that will extend for 24 hours after the deadline. An assignment turned in after the due date, but before the end of the grace period will not be considered late. The grace period extends to all students—you do not need to ask for permission or notify me if you plan to turn in work during the grace period. The grace period does not apply to reading

quizzes, **or the final exam**, given that our final is scheduled for the very end of the exam period. The final exam must be turned in on-time.

Late Assignments Policy: If you have a personal emergency or are ill, contact your Reader at the *earliest opportunity* about an extension. Unexcused late assignments will be marked down 5% for each day after the grace period of 24 hours expires. Late assignments other than the final exam will be accepted for up to one week after the end of the grace period. At times, Readers or I may request documentation of an illness, emergency, or other situation for an extension to be granted.

Academic Accommodations: If you are a DSP student please verify that the DSP office has sent me a copy of your letter. If you have an accommodation for take-home assignments, it is your responsibility to contact your Reader to ask for an extension and work out a timeline for each assignment for which you request accommodation. Please bear in mind that accommodations for extra time on in-class exams do not apply to take-home assignments. I will be using the DSP proctoring service for the in-class exam. You are always welcome to reach out to me to discuss accommodations. Accommodations are also available for the observance of religious holidays, or due to conflicts related to student athletics. Please reach out to me also if you have another issue not “officially” covered and we can talk about it. Here is a link to more information from UCB about academic accommodations and resources:

<https://evcp.berkeley.edu/requests-accommodations-adjustments-and-flexibility>

Grading Scale: Your assignments will be given a numeric score and posted on the grade book in bCourses. At the end of the semester, your scores will be totaled and converted to a letter grade based on the percentage scale below. A+ grades may be awarded at my discretion to the very top student(s) in the class. All assignments together total 1000 points. If you take the course P/NP, you must earn a 70% or above to pass.

93% + A	90-92 A-	87-89 B+	83-86 B	80-82 B-	77-79 C+
73-76 C	70-72 C-	67-69 D+	63-66 D	60-62 D-	59 and below is failing

Re-grade policy: Please first talk with the Reader who graded your assignment for more feedback. Readers have the authority to change grades if they believe it is warranted. If you believe a mistake was made on your assignment, and want me to review it, write a short statement explaining why you think your assignment deserves a different grade, making sure to reference the assignment rubric. This statement should be about the substance of your work, rather than effort. I will then re-grade your paper and determine the final grade for the assignment. All re-grade requests must be made within a week of when an assignment is handed back. Per University policy, no re-grades are possible for final exams.

Incomplete Grades: Incompletes are an option of last resort for students experiencing true medical or other emergencies that make it impossible for them to complete their coursework on time. To be considered for an incomplete grade, students need to speak with me about it DURING the semester, have completed at least half of the required coursework, and provide documentation of the reason for the request.

Academic honesty is expected of all students. It is extremely important that everyone submits their own original work, produced specifically for this course, to receive credit. Suspected violations relating to this course will be reported to the office of student conduct and dealt with according to university policies. *Be aware of plagiarism.* Word for word use of even a single sentence from any author, publication or website without proper citation is plagiarism and is unethical and unacceptable. So is very closely following the structure and wording of another author's work. In addition, please be aware that you may not turn in any portion of *your own* previous work submitted for credit in another course without substantial revision. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the paper or exam in question with no opportunity to rewrite, as will any other kind of academic dishonesty. If you have questions about how to properly cite materials, or how to paraphrase appropriately, please ask! The student writing center is a good resource for questions about this. All of your assignments will be checked for plagiarism by **Turnitin** on bCourses. Please be aware that this program keeps a database of work previously turned in for this class by other students, as well as any of your own work that you turned in for credit in a previous class.

We are in a new era of much controversy and uncertainty about the role and use of artificial intelligence in academic assignments and writing. My current position is that to receive credit, students need to produce original work. I strongly recommend that you do not use ChatGPT or other AI platforms in your work. If you do use any AI platforms to develop an assignment, you need to reference and explain how you used it and for what reasons. I am not interested in what ChatGPT has to say in response to our assignment prompts—only in what you have to say. If the Readers or I have questions or suspicions about whether an assignment is your original work or was produced by AI, we will request to talk with you about it and orally assess your knowledge of the subject matter in the assignment to assign you a grade.

Notes and Circulation of Course Materials: DO NOT reproduce course materials or post them on-line or anywhere else. This includes the syllabus, lecture slides, your notes, handouts, rubrics and exams. While you may share your notes with other students in this semester's class, it is against university policy to share your notes broadly or attempt to use them for commercial purposes. It is also a violation of the policy to record lectures without my consent, and/or try to use recordings for commercial

purposes. Please see <http://campuspol.chance.berkeley.edu/policies/coursenotes.pdf> for a detailed version of the policy.

University Resources for Students

Your Health and Well-Being: Life as a Berkeley student can be full of excitement and possibilities, but at times may feel overwhelming or be difficult in other ways. Some degree of this is to be expected, but if you are experiencing a lot of distress, anxiety or have a pre-existing mental health issue, there are resources on campus to help. You are not alone; many others share your difficulties. Even if you don't think you need them, I encourage you to look at these websites now, so you know what is available. There are much more than counseling appointments: there are web tutorials and videos, support groups and mindfulness classes, for example. Counseling center staff have told me these groups and classes can be a great preventative resource and are a great way to get the semester off to a good start. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), (510) 642-9494, <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/counseling>. More general resources on mental health, services are at <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/health-topics/mental-health> .

Remember that regular exercise, getting enough sleep, healthy eating, getting together with friends in-person to have fun and not spending too much time online/on your phone are important ways to support mental health.

Student Learning Center: "The primary academic support service for students at Berkeley, the SLC helps students transition to Cal; navigate the academic terrain; create networks of resources; and achieve academic, personal and professional goals." <https://slc.berkeley.edu/home>

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Services: To learn more about these issues, how to support survivors, or how to file a report and receive support services, start here: <http://survivorsupport.berkeley.edu>. Please note that I am not a confidential advocate; I am a mandated reporter. You can speak to a Confidential Care Advocate.

Undocumented Students can find university resources and support at: <https://undocu.berkeley.edu/>

Economic, Food, and Housing Support: If you are in need of economic, food, or housing support, you can find help at the Basic Needs Center (<https://basicneeds.berkeley.edu/home>).

Technology resources and support for students: Please see this page for the latest information on university-provided support *and especially if something happens to your computer and you need to borrow one*. <https://studenttech.berkeley.edu/home>