

Sierra Bell  
AMST S435/ANTH S243  
Yale Summer Session 2017—Session A  
Tuesday/Thursday 1 pm-4:15 pm

## **Inequality in America**

This course explores the sociocultural dimensions of inequality in the contemporary United States. Our readings draw on work in anthropology, sociology, economics, history, cultural studies, and investigative journalism to examine how neoliberal policies, exacerbated by the Great Recession, impact Americans divided by identity categories such as race, class, gender, and citizenship. We focus on the ways in which the social dynamics that produce inequality are embedded in worlds of cultural meaning and institutionalized as taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life. Structural disparities in income, wealth, and opportunity ultimately raise questions about the kind of society we live in and whether the nation's democratic ideals can survive the extreme polarization of life chances that exist in our polity today.

### **Course Assignments and Grades:**

All students are expected to actively participate in every class discussion. Students will develop skills to verbally engage with the course themes, reading materials, and one another out loud in class discussions.

Each student will make three brief class presentations on topics of their choice related to course themes. The first two presentations focus on media representations of inequality—students will sign up for presentation days/topics on the first day of class. Each student will also give a third presentation about their final project on the last day of class.

Students will complete five writing assignments due at the end of each week over the course of the five-week session. The first four are short writing assignments—2-3 double-spaced pages each—devoted to analyzing the themes of each of the first four weeks. The fifth writing assignment is the final project essay—8-10 pages—to be completed in the fifth week of class. Details about each writing assignment & tips for developing strong writing skills will be provided in class.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- Daily class participation (20%)
- Three class presentations (5% each—15% total)
- Four short writing assignments (10% each—40% total)
- Final project essay (25%)

## Course Policies

- Attendance at every class meeting is mandatory.
- Computers, tablets, phones, and other electronic devices are not allowed class.
- All assignments must be submitted to the course website on time and in the proper format.
- Do not plagiarize.
- Always complete the assigned readings before each class meeting.
- Always engage with fellow students respectfully. We will be grappling with topics that can be difficult to talk about. Listen to one another with an open mind. You are encouraged to challenge statements that you disagree with, but always offer your own position in a way that is polite and considerate to others. At the same time, be open to respectful challenges to your own opinions or interpretations. All students must do their part to ensure that this class remains a safe space for everyone to share, reflect, and learn from one another's divergent perspectives.

## Required Readings

Books for this course will be available on Reserve in Bass Library or for purchase at the Yale Bookstore. PDFs of articles and single chapters from some books will be available on the course website. **Students may also consider buying discounted or used copies of required texts in advance—[www.bookfinder.com](http://www.bookfinder.com) is a useful resource for comparing book prices for different online retailers.**

PLEASE NOTE: Prospective students are encouraged to contact the instructor (at [sierra.bell@yale.edu](mailto:sierra.bell@yale.edu)) if they have any questions or concerns about the reading requirements.

Vincanne Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*, 2013.

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, 2012.

Alicia Schmidt Camacho, "Hailing the Twelve Million: U.S. Immigration Policy Failure and the Imaginary of Lawful Violence," *Social Text*, Winter 2010. (Article)

Jane Collins and Victoria Meyer, *Both Hands Tied: Welfare Reform and the Race to the Bottom in the Low-Wage Labor Market*, 2010.

Kathryn Dudley, *Debt and Dispossession: Farm Loss in America's Heartland*, 2000.

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class*, 2011.

Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*, 2009.

Jeff Hobbs, *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace*, 2014.

Christine Walley, *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*, 2013.

## Course Schedule

### WEEK 1—Inequality in America

Tues: Inequality Questions—Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?

- Discuss: Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics*, Chapter 1
  - A PDF of this chapter will be provided for all enrolled students before the term begins
- Activity: Examples of Media Representations (News & Pop Culture)

Thurs: Cultural Narratives and Economic Restructuring

- Discuss: Walley, *Exit Zero*
- Student Presentations: Media Representations

Due Friday by 5pm: Autobiography on Inequality

### WEEK 2—Interpreting “Meritocracy”: Discourses of Blame and Deservingness

Tues: Loss, Trauma, and Individualism

- Discuss: Dudley, *Debt and Dispossession*
- Student Presentations: Media Representations
- Activity: Discuss questions for final project topic

Thurs: ‘Smartness,’ Bonuses, and Risk

- Discuss: Ho, *Liquidated*, Chapters 1 & 6
- Student Presentations: Media Representations

Due Friday by 5pm: Analysis of the notion of ‘Meritocracy’

### WEEK 3—Structures of Exclusion: Race, Citizenship, and Social Belonging

Tues: Legal Violence

- Discuss: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Selected Chapters  
Alicia Schmidt Camacho, “Hailing the Twelve Million”
- Student Presentations: Media Representations
- Activity: Choose and refine final project topics

Thurs: Economic Citizenship & Welfare Reform

- Discuss: Collins and Meyer, *Both Hands Tied*, Selected Chapters
- Student Presentations: Media Representations

Due Friday by 5pm: Analysis of *Exclusion* in systems of inequality

## **WEEK 4—Neoliberal Government**

Tues: Is This What Democracy Looks Like?

- Discuss: Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics*, Selected Chapters
- Student Presentations: Media Representations
- Activity: PolicyMap at CSSSI

Thurs: Disaster Capitalism: Public Funding, Private Profits, and Failed ‘Recovery’

- Discuss: Adams, *Markets of Sorrow*, Selected Chapters
- Student Presentations: Media Representations
- Activity: Workshop final project thesis and analysis

Due Friday by 5pm: Analysis of *Neoliberal Policies* and rising inequality

## **WEEK 5—Cultural Interpretations of Inequality**

Tues: Inequality at Yale

- Discuss: Hobbs, *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace*
- Student Presentations: Media Representations

Thurs: Addressing Inequality

- Final Project Presentations
- Concluding discussion

Due Friday by 5pm: Final Project Essay