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.

All students are expected to participate in class discussion and attendance at every meeting is mandatory. Students must notify the professor of an unavoidable absence in advance. Five papers are required over the course of the five-week session. The first four are each 2-3 pages; the fifth paper (final project) is 8-10 pages. Late papers will not be accepted without prior permission of the instructor. Details about the paper assignments will be provided in class. Each student will make two class presentations on topics of their choice related to course themes: the first, on a media representation of inequality; the second, on the final project.

Grades will be calculated as follows: class participation (20%); class presentations (15%); first four papers (10% each=40%); final paper (25%).

Required readings are on reserve at Bass Library (*), on the class website (**), or available for purchase at the Yale Bookstore:

Kathryn Dudley, *Debt and Dispossession: Farm Loss in America’s Heartland* (2000)*
Course Outline

WEEK 1

Tues, May 28: Anthropology of Inequality
  • Discuss: Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics*, pp. 11-40
  • Media Representations (NYT)

Thurs, May 30: Deindustrialization
  • Discuss: Walley, *Exit Zero*, pp. 57-116
  • Media Representations (Walley)

  • Due: Autobiography on Inequality, Friday 5/31 by 5pm

WEEK 2

Tues, June 4: Mortgage Crises
  • Discuss: Dudley, *Debt and Dispossession*, pp. 21-64, 105-144
  • Media Representations

  • Due: Questions for final project topic

Thurs, June 6: Neoliberalism
  • Discuss: Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics*, pp. 41-160
  • Activity: PolicyMap at CSSSI

  • Due: PolicyMap Analysis, Friday 6/7 by 5pm

WEEK 3

Tues., June 11: Welfare Reform
  • Discuss: Collins and Meyer, *Both Hands Tied*, pp. 1-25, 83-158
  • Media Representations

Thurs., June 13: Race Matters
  • Discuss: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Chs. 1, 3, 4
  • Activity: Op-Eds

  • Due: Op-Ed, Friday 6/14 by 5pm
WEEK 4

Tues., June 18: Narcopolitics
   - Discuss: Garriott, *Policing Methamphetamine*, pp. 19-102
   - Media Representations

Thurs., June 20: Lawful Violence
   - Discuss: Alicia Schmidt Camacho, “Hailing the Twelve Million”
   - Media Representations

WEEK 5

Tues., June 25: Class at Yale
   - Discuss: Hobs, *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace*
   - Media Representations

Thurs., June 27: Addressing Inequality
   - Final Project Presentations
   - Concluding discussion

   - Final project paper due Friday, June 28 by 5pm