

**Sociology 130AC**  
**UC Berkeley, Fall 2020**

**Social Inequalities, American Cultures**

Monday, Wednesday & Friday, 1 PM-2 PM, Wherever You May Be (Remote)

**Instructor:** Joanna Reed, Ph.D., [joannareed@berkeley.edu](mailto:joannareed@berkeley.edu)

**Office Hours:** Wednesday 2:15-4:15 (sign-up), Friday 2-2:30, (drop-in, after class) and by appointment. Sign up here: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/ktudw>

**Course Description:**

This course explores the causes, consequences and extent of social and economic 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 by examining key institutions central to generating and sustaining inequalities in the contemporary United States: families, neighborhoods, education, labor markets and incarceration. Within each domain, we pay special attention to the significance of race and ethnicity, social class and gender and how they combine to produce different outcomes and consequences for individuals and social groups.

*You are used to academic challenges! This course may also be challenging in non-academic 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, all of which may cause discomfort.
- **Your personal experiences may not fit the sociological insights presented** in class or in the readings. This is an opportunity for learning and exploration, but some students find this personally challenging and even threatening.
- **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. Your questions should show some consideration for your audience, and your answers should show some knowledge and context for the topic being discussed.

### **Goals for the course:**

By the end of the semester, you should 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 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 experience in working with Census data through the neighborhood project.

### **Required Readings:**

All readings will be available to you through bCourses, under “Files” or through “Pages” or the library (\$2 a Day). However, you may choose to purchase readings for greater ease and convenience.

**Book:** Edin, K. & Shaefer, L. (2015) *\$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. (Any edition is fine)

This book is available as an electronic resource through the UCB library website. Look up the title on “Oskicat” and click on the ebook option. You may also be able to borrow it as an ebook through your local public library.

**Reader:** The course reader can be purchased at the Copy Central Store at 2411 Telegraph Ave. If you want a hard copy, they will send you one. This year, Copy Central is also offering rentals of digital readers. These have several helpful features, such as highlighting, bookmarking, read aloud and more. <https://copycentral.redshelf.com/book/1620201/soc-130ac-social-inequalities-american-cultures-1620201-none-joanna-reed>

**Articles:** Journal articles that are available through the library’s website are posted on bCourses but are not in the physical copy of the reader, if you buy one.

**Supplemental References:** Throughout the semester, I post documents I think will be useful to you in the “Supplemental Resources” folder under “Files” on bCourses.

**What’s Different This Semester:** To start by stating the obvious, this semester’s course will be totally different from usual in that we will be fully remote and online. Like it or not, you and I are part of this experiment in remote learning while we collectively struggle as a society through the COVID-19 pandemic. I ask for your flexibility and understanding as we figure this out together, and I will extend the same to you. In addition to testing out fully remote learning, some of us are likely to experience disruptions from power-safety-shutoffs and wildfires in our areas this fall. All of this means that I may need to make adjustments to the course and plans as we proceed.

- **Recorded and “Live” Lectures:** This semester there will be both recorded lectures (“asynchronous “ material in the remote learning jargon) and “live” zoom classes. All material will be recorded and made available to you. Attendance is not required at the “live” classes, but please make an effort to attend. Live classes will be discussion based and I will expect you to participate, in a friendly, low-stakes way. I anticipate that we will usually have “live” (or “synchronous”, in the remote learning jargon) classes on Wed. and Friday, but this may change from week to week. Please make an effort to be available during our scheduled class time on these days. Some weeks will have more material to review independently, others more discussion. I will take care that the “live” classes and other materials together do not add up to be more than the three hours of class time allotted for this course.
- **Class schedule:** Each Monday, by class time, I will post a plan for the week on “Pages”. This will tell you when we are having “live” classes, if there is recorded material or videos to watch, zoom links, readings, homework, etc. I will intend that the “Page” for the week will have all the information you need. I will be creating materials as we go, so I will not be able to post all materials for the semester in advance.
- **Reading Schedule:** For any given week, please read in the order listed on the syllabus. Readings are assigned for the week (rather than the day) to allow for more flexibility in the class, but we will generally consider them sequentially. In general, try to use Monday as a reading day and complete all the reading for that week before Friday’s class.
- **Homework:** Instead of in-class participation, most weeks there will be a short homework assignment or quiz. These will not be graded but their timely completion will count towards 20% of your course grade. Assignments will center around understanding course concepts and readings and scaffolding the larger assignments.
- **Due dates:** All assignments will have a due date, as usual. However, in consideration of the altered circumstances many of us are in due to the pandemic, after the due

date I will have a grace period of two days (48 hrs. after “official” due date) when an assignment can still be turned in without being late.

- **Announcements:** The bCourses “announcement” feature will be an important way I will communicate with students this fall. Please make a habit of checking announcements regularly on the course site as there were some glitches with them going out by email last spring.

## **EVALUATION:**

**Applying Theory Paper:** 20% of grade

**Take-Home Mid-term Essay Exam:** 20% of grade

**Neighborhood Project:** 20% of grade.

**Take-Home Final Essay Exam:** 20% of grade

**Homework:** 20% of grade

**Take-home Essay Exams:** Both the midterm and final exam will be take-home essay exams. Essay prompts for both exams will be posted one week before each exam is due. The final exam will focus on the second part of the course but may include material from before the midterm.

**Applying Theory Paper:** In this 4-6 page paper, you will analyze either a current event or other recent social phenomenon according to at least 2 different theories/readings we have considered and discussed in class. The assignment prompt is posted on bCourses.

**Neighborhood Project:** The project incorporates elements of fieldwork, working with census data and a written essay. This semester, everyone will focus on the neighborhood where they are currently living, as long as it is in the U.S. The assignment prompt is on bCourses.

**Homework:** The purpose of homework this semester is to create opportunities for staying engaged and caught up in the class, to help you prepare for the larger assignments, and to reward students who put effort into that. There will be a short homework assignment most weeks of the semester, announced on Monday. It is meant to be completed the week it is assigned (it will correspond to what we are doing in class that week, or an upcoming assignment) but will be formally due the following Wednesday. The homework assignments will not be formally graded but we will check them to make sure they reflect adequate effort. Everyone will be able to miss one homework without it counting against you, and I will give you the chance to make up an additional one or two missed homework assignments at the end of the semester.

## **GRADING POLICIES:**

**Late Assignments Policy:** If you have a personal emergency or are ill, contact me at the *earliest opportunity* to discuss alternative arrangements. Unexcused late assignments will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each day they are late after a special grace period of two days (Fall 2020 semester only). At times, I may request documentation of an illness, emergency or other situation.

**Re-grade policy:** Please first talk with the person who graded your assignment for more feedback on your work. 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 paragraph 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. You can email this to me, or give it to me in person. I will then re-grade your paper and determine the final grade for the assignment. Please be aware that if I re-evaluate your work, it is possible that your grade could go down, so consider these requests carefully. 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 coursework, and provide documentation of the reason for the request.

**Turnitin:** All of your assignments will be checked for plagiarism by Turnitin. 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.

**Academic honesty is expected of all students.** It is extremely important that everyone submits their own work. 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, ask during office hours, and consult Ch. 6 of the writing guide "Writing for Sociology", available on the Soc. department website.

**Zoom Meetings: Please turn your video on if you can!** I understand that there are many legitimate reasons why students do not always have their video on during “live” class meetings, and that we all experience internet and technology failures from time-to-time. That said, I truly appreciate it when you turn your video on.

### **OFFICE HOURS:**

I will have sign-up office hours on Wednesdays from 2:15-4:15. Sign up here:  
<https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/ktudw>

I will have drop-in office hours on Fridays, (same Zoom meeting, as long as we are having class that day) from 2:00-2:30—no appointment necessary.

If you are having trouble with the class or are experiencing personal problems that are hindering your ability to do well in it, please come to office hours early in the semester. I can't help you if you don't communicate with me!

Please also come to office hours for whatever reason—dropping by to say “hi” is a good reason. So are questions about the class topics and readings and your interests in them, or to share a personal experience. Remember that if I know you, I will be able to write you a much better letter of recommendation if you find yourself in need of one in the future.

**Email:** Keep in mind that I may not be able to respond to email right away—especially this semester! Do not expect a response on weekends or outside of regular working hours. I do not answer emails when the answer is easily found on the course syllabus (i.e., “when are your office hours?”).

### **OTHER:**

**Accommodations:** If you require **accommodations** for a disability, university athletics, or have a conflict due to the observance of religious holidays, please email or speak with me early in the semester to discuss appropriate arrangements.

**Your Health and Well-Being:** Being a college 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 is 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> .

**Student Resources for Fall 2020:** I will make an effort to link to student resources here and make you aware of information that comes my way.

Campus FAQ for students about remote instruction: <https://registrar.berkeley.edu/service-adjustments/instruction-faq>

Student Technology Equity Program: <https://technology.berkeley.edu/STEP>

## **Course Schedule\*:**

### **Part I: Understanding Social Inequalities**

#### **Week 1: Aug. 26, 28: Where we are now**

Readings: Smith, S. (2020) "These Protests Feel Different, But We Have To Be Realistic: There's A Long Road Ahead." *The Guardian*, June 14, 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/14/these-protests-feel-different-but-we-have-to-be-realistic-theres-a-long-road-ahead>)

Oppel, R. et al. (2020) "The Fullest Look Yet at the Racial Inequality of Coronavirus." *The New York Times*, July 5, 2020 (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-latinos-african-americans-cdc-data.html>)

Karma, R. (2020) "Deaths of Despair': The Deadly Epidemic that Predated Coronavirus." *Vox*, April 15, 2020 (<https://www.vox.com/2020/4/15/21214734/deaths-of-despair-coronavirus-covid-19-angus-deaton-anne-case-americans-deaths>)

#### **Week 2: Aug. 31, Sept. 2, 4: 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 and Ch. 4 "By Any Means Necessary"

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

Recommended: Keister, L. (2014) "The One Percent". *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 40, pp. 347-367 (focus on "Defining the One Percent" and "Contemporary Income and Wealth Concentration" )

#### **Week 3: Sept. 9, 11: 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

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

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

#### **Week 4: Sept. 14, 16, 18: Foundational Theories of Inequality and Stratification**

Readings: Morris, A. (2017) "W.E.B. DuBois at the Center: From Science, Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter." *British Journal of Sociology*, 68(1)

DuBois, W.E. B. (1903/2003) *The Souls of Black Folk*. Ch. 6 or 8 (you choose!). New York: Barnes & Noble Classics

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  
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-capital.htm>

Newman, S. & Celano, D. (2012) "Worlds Apart". *American Educator*, Fall 2012

#### **Week 5: Sept. 21, 23, 25: More Theories of Inequality and Stratification: Building on Foundations**

##### **Applying Theory Paper Due Sept. 25<sup>th</sup>, 5pm**

Readings: Collins, P. & Bilge, S. (2016) *Intersectionality*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. Ch. 1 "What Is Intersectionality?"

Lorber, J. (2011) "The Social Construction of Gender" in Eds. Grusky, D. & Szelenyi, S. *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class and Gender* (2007), pp. 318-325. Westview Press: Boulder, CO

#### **Week 6: Sept. 28, Sept. 30, Oct. 2: Theories of Racial and Ethnic Inequality**

Readings: Roberts, D. (2011). *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics and Big Business Re-Crete Race in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: The New Press. Ch. 1 "The Invention of Race"

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 (Ch. 2 recommended)



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

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

### **Week 7: Oct. 5, 7, 9: Racial and Ethnic Inequality**

Readings: 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

Gonzales, A. (2001) "Urban(Trans)Formations: Changes in the Meaning and Use of American Indian Identity". Pp. 169-185 in eds. Lobo, S & Peters, K. *American Indians and the Urban Experience*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press

### **Week 8: Oct. 12, 14, 16: 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"

Gilens, M. & Page, B. (2014) "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups and Average Citizens". *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 3

Recommended: Edin, K. & Shafer, L. (2015) *\$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Ch. 1 "Welfare is Dead"

Matthews, D. (2016) "Remember That Study Saying America Is An Oligarchy? 3 Rebuttals Say It's Wrong." *Vox*, May 9, 2016.  
<https://www.vox.com/2016/5/9/11502464/gilens-page-oligarchy-study>

Dreby, J. (2015). *Everyday Illegal: When Policies Undermine Immigrant Families*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Ch. 2 "Nervios"

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

### **Week 9: Oct. 19, 21, 23: Families and Family Structure**

#### **Take-Home Mid-term Essay due Oct. 21 at 5 pm.**

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

McLanahan, S. & Percheski, C. (2008). "Family Structure and the Reproduction of Inequalities". *Annual Review of Sociology* 34: 257-74

**Week 10: Oct. 26, 28, 30: Neighborhoods**

Readings: "Neighborhoods Matter". *Opportunity Insights*, Harvard University. Make sure to explore the "Opportunity Atlas" linked in the site.

<https://opportunityinsights.org/neighborhoods/>

Peterson, R. & Krivo, L. (2010). *Divergent Social Worlds: Neighborhood Crime and the Racial-Spatial Divide*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Ch. 3 "Divergent Social Worlds", pp. 50-70

"1968 Kerner Commission Report" Excerpt from UC Berkeley Othering and Belonging Institute. <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/1968-kerner-commission-report>

Recommended: Massey, D. & Denton, D. (1993) *American Apartheid*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Ch. 2

**Week 11: Nov. 2, 4, 6: Education**

Readings: 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

Jimenez, T. & Horowitz, A. (2015) "Whitewashing Academic Mediocrity". *Contexts*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 38-42

Recommended: *The College Payoff*, The Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University

**Week 12: Nov. 9, 13: Education/ Labor Markets**

Readings: Mettler, S. (2014) *Degrees of Inequality: How the Politics of Higher Education Sabotaged the American Dream*. New York: Basic Books. Ch. 1 "Creating Degrees of Inequality" & 2 "Diminishing Returns: The Transformation of Federal Student Aid Over Time"

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

Recommended: Edin, K. & Shaefer, L. (2015). *\$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Ch. 2 "Perilous Work"

**Week 13: Nov. 16, 18, 20: Labor Markets**

Schor, J., Cansoy, M., Charles, W., Ladegaard, I., & Wengronowitz, R. (2019) "Dependence and Precarity in The Platform Economy". Boston College

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

**Week 14: Nov. 23 (Thanksgiving Break): Mass incarceration**

**Neighborhood project due Nov. 23, 5 pm.**

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

**Week 15: Nov. 30, Dec. 2, 4: Mass Incarceration**

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

**"RRR" week: Dec. 7-11**

**Final Exam: Take Home Final Exam is due on Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>, 10 pm.** Questions will be available one week prior to the due date.

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