

**Sociology 130AC**  
**UC Berkeley, Fall 2023**

**Social Inequalities, American Cultures**

MWF, 2:00-3:00pm, 100 GPB (Genetics and Plant Bio)

**Instructor:** Joanna Reed, Ph.D., [joannareed@berkeley.edu](mailto:joannareed@berkeley.edu), 419 Social Sciences Building

**Office hours:** Wednesdays 9:30am-10:30am and 3:30-4:30pm by appointment, in-person (419 SSB) or remote. Sign-up sheet is linked on bCourses main page. Drop-in office hours immediately following class on Mondays until 3:30 outside the west entrance of our classroom.

**Course Description:**

If you have ever taken a social science course, or even look at the news these days, then you already know that there is a lot of inequality in the U.S. This course offers a systematic introduction to exploring 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. 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 race and ethnicity, social class, 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 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 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 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. While this may cause discomfort it is also an opportunity for learning.
- **Your personal experiences may not fit the social patterns presented** in class or in the readings. This is another opportunity for learning and exploration, but some students find this to be 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.

## **Evaluation:**

**Reading Quizzes:** 10% of grade

**Exam 1, Applying Theory:** 20% of grade

**Exam 2, Midterm:** 20% of grade

**Neighborhoods and Social Environments Project:** 30% of grade

-Fieldwork (15%)

- Paper (15%)

**Final Exam:** 20% of grade

## Course Schedule\*:

### Part I: Understanding Social Inequalities

**Week 1: Aug. 23, 25: A portrait of extremes: life at the bottom and top of the income scale**

Readings: Edin, K. & Shafer, 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

**Week 2: Aug. 28, 30, Sept. 1: 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

DuBois, W.E.B. (1897) "The Strivings of the Negro People". *The Atlantic Monthly*

**Week 3: Sept. 6, 8 (no class on Sept. 4—Labor Day): Foundational Theories: How are they useful today?**

**Reading Quiz 1 released on Sept. 8 after class, due before class on Sept. 11.**

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

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

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

**Week 4: Sept. 11, 13, 15: More Theories of Inequality and Stratification: Building on Foundations**

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

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

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.)

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)

### **Week 5: Sept. 18, 20, 22: Understanding Gender Inequality**

**Exam 1 in class on Sept. 18, covering material from weeks 1-4.**

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

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

### **Week 6: Sept. 25, 27, 29: Understanding 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 & 2

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. 2, 4, 6: Intersectional Inequalities**

**Reading Quiz 2 released on Oct. 6 after class, due before class on Oct. 9.**

Readings: Foner, N. (2022) *One Quarter of the Nation*. Princeton University Press. Ch. 2 "The Racial Order"

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

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

Recommended: Zhou, M. & Gonzalez, R. (2019) "Divergent Destinies: Children of Immigrants Growing up in the United States". *Annual Review of Sociology*, 45:383-99

### **Week 8: Oct. 9, 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"

Desmond, M. (2023) *Poverty, By America*. New York: Crown. Ch. 5 "How We Rely on Welfare"

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"

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

#### **Week 9: Oct. 16, 18, 20: Families and Family Structure**

**Exam 2 on Oct. 18 in class, covering material from weeks 5-8. No lecture on Oct. 16.**

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. 23, 25, 27: Neighborhoods**

**Reading Quiz 3 released after class on Oct. 27, due before class on Oct. 30.**

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

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

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

#### **Week 11: Oct. 30, Nov. 1, 3: 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

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"

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"

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

**Week 12: Nov. 6, 8 (no class on Nov. 10, Veterans Day): Education/ Labor Markets**

**Neighborhood and Social Environments Project: Fieldwork Report due Nov. 8**

Readings: Mettler, S. (2014) *Degrees of Inequality: How the Politics of Higher Education Sabotaged the American Dream*. New York: Basic Books Ch. 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

**Week 13: Nov. 13, 15, 17 : Labor Markets**

**Reading Quiz 4 released on Nov. 17, due on Nov. 20 before 2pm.**

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

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

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

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

**Week 14: Nov. 20-24 (Thanksgiving Holiday Break)**

**Neighborhood and Social Environments Paper due Nov. 21**

No class this week and no new reading.

**Week 15: Nov. 27, 29, Dec. 1: Mass Incarceration**

## **Reading Quiz 5 (optional) released after class on Dec. 1, due before 2pm on Dec. 4**

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

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

**RRR Week:** Dec. 4-9

**Final Exam:** Dec. 14, 3:00-6:00pm, location TBD.

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

## **Overview of assignments and academic expectations.**

**Reading Quizzes:** The reading assignments form the backbone of our class. The goals for the quizzes are to incentivize keeping up with the reading as well as provide some benchmark of your comprehension. Quizzes are open-book. There will be 5 quizzes. Each quiz will be released in the quiz section of bCourses after class on Friday when a quiz is scheduled, and due the following Monday before class. 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 5 quizzes.

**Exams:** All exams will be in-class written exams. The first exam will focus on material through week 4. The second exam will cover material from weeks 5-8. The final exam will cover weeks 9 through 15 and will be of a similar length to the other two exams. You will not need to bring a green book to the exams. Electronic devices must stay in bags and backpacks during exams. If you are an international student, you may bring a paper English dictionary for reference.

**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. 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.

**Reading:** Much of the work of this class consists of keeping up with and mastering the content of the assigned readings. All readings will be available to you through bCourses. The best way to access the readings is by going to "Pages" and selecting the page for the appropriate week. You can also access readings by clicking "Files"> "Readings" and then the folder for the week, but please note that bCourses by default will list the readings in alphabetical order here, which may not be the same order in which we will cover them in class.

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.

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. Numerous studies have shown that we retain material better when we read it offline. Also, you don't need internet access or a functioning computer to do the reading and stay caught up! Please note that the two books listed above are NOT included in the volume that is for sale. Both print and digital versions are available.

**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. To reward students for attendance, we will have periodic random attendance checks for which you will earn extra credit points. Classes are not recorded so make plans to exchange notes with a classmate in case you are absent. Lecture slides will be posted on bCourses before class.

**Try to keep up with the news,** using a reliable source. This will make class more meaningful as you will see how often our class topics are relevant to current events. I suggest major news outlets such as NPR (National Public Radio), *The New York Times*, *The LA Times* or other major newspapers. NPR is free, and you can get access to newspapers through the UCB library. More information is on the "Library Resources" page on bCourses.

## **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. Around 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 any issues around attendance checks. This same person may grade all or some of your assignments.

**Grace Period for Neighborhood Project Assignments:** These 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 official due date, but before the end of the grace period will not be considered late. The grace period extends to all students for both Neighborhood Project assignments—you do not need to ask for permission or notify us if you plan to turn in work during the grace period.

**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. Readers or I may request documentation of an illness, emergency, or other situation.

**Academic Accommodations:** If you are a DSP student, please make sure that the DSP office has sent me a copy of your letter. Accommodations for extra time on exams and other conditions will be met through the DSP proctoring service and you can expect to hear from us in advance of exams. Reading quizzes are open book and only expected to take 20-30 minutes or so. Since you have more than two full days to complete each quiz, and control over the environmental conditions for taking the quiz, DSP accommodations for quizzes are met and no further action is needed. 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 new due date. Please bear in mind that accommodations for extra time on in-class exams do not apply to take-home assignments. You are always welcome to reach out to me to discuss any accommodations. Accommodations are also available for the observance of religious holidays, or due to conflicts related to student athletics. Please also reach out to me 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/programs-resources/academic-accommodations-hub>

**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. All assignments together total 1000 points (e.g. 100% =1000 points). If you take the course P/NP, you must earn a 70% or above to pass.

97-100 A+	87-89 B+	77-79 C+	67-69 D+	59 and below is failing
93-96 A	83-86 B	73-76 C	63-66 D	
90-92 A-	80-82 B-	70-72 C-	60-62 D-	

**Re-grade policy:** Please first talk with the person 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 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, in order 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.

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 position is that any use of AI programs to produce work for this class is another version of plagiarism and will be treated as such.

**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.

## 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. New challenges and situations are an opportunity for learning about yourself, the world and the kind of life you want to have and some degree of discomfort and adjustment is to be expected. However, if you are experiencing distress or anxiety to the extent that it is negatively affecting your academic and social life, 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. In addition to counseling appointments there are web tutorials and videos, support groups and mindfulness classes. 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: <https://studenttech.berkeley.edu/home>

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