**Soc 21800-02**: Social Inequality

Spring 2019

R. Joshua Scannell

**Class Meeting Time:** T/F 12:45-2pm

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**Office hours**: Tues 11-12 pm HW1636

**Meeting Room:** HW404

Certain national myths notwithstanding, American society is – and always has been – deeply unequal. While emphasis changes based on political allegiances, most mainstream explanations for this inequality rely on a combination of assumptions about cultural differences, individual unwillingness to work, and systemic lack of opportunities. But, ultimately these analyses contend that whether one “succeeds” or “fails” in America supposedly comes down to the individual. In this class, we will question and critique this prevailing American mythology. We will ask what concrete historical practices and contemporary systems work to stratify, sort, and organize groups of people differently in the United States. Why do they work? How do they work? What are they for?

To answer these questions, this course is divided into three sections. The first section will look at the construction and logic of the prevailing economic theories and policies, broadly called “neoliberalism,” that have driven rising American inequality for the last forty years. The second section focuses on how race, gender, and migration have historically been mobilized to organize class difference, and inclusion or exclusion from the American polity. The third section will turn towards the present and look at how the American “carceral” system has taken on the burden of reproducing historical forms of inequality.

Although this syllabus maps the whole class, it is not an absolute document. I reserve the right to amend it based on student response and developing events. Please be sure to check communications from me, and to attend classes so you will be abreast of changes.

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the class, students should be able to:

* Demonstrate familiarity with key historical processes that structure ongoing American inequality
* Have a solid understanding of the structural forces that reproduce American inequality
* Hone students’ ability to deploy sociological analyses of inequality

**Assignments and Grades**

Evaluation will be comprised of

* In-class discussion and participation (30%). This includes 1) Attendance 2) *Arriving on time*3)Reading the material closely enough to discuss it. 4) Arriving prepared for group work. 5) Actively participating in group discussions. It is crucial that you have thoroughly read each assignment *before* you come to class, as I will expect every student to contribute to the in-class discussions. 6) Paying attention during class time. 7) *Remaining in contact with your group in the event of absences*.
* Three 5 pg *essays* (20%). Details forthcoming.
* Six 2 pg. *reading responses* (20%). These will be spread over the course of the semester and graded on a 5 pt. scale. These responses should be open-ended critical reflections (ie *not summaries*) on the readings required for a particular class. They are due *before class* on the day the readings you are addressing are discussed. Students must submit two reflections *per unit.* It is *your responsibility* to decide what readings you will respond to.They *cannot be turned in late* and *cannot all be turned in at once*. If you do not complete a response in a timely fashion *you cannot make up the missing grade*.
* Three take-home “quizzes” (20%). These quizzes will evaluate students’ familiarity with and understanding of the material as well as the ability to use key concepts analytically.
* Discussion questions (10%). Students must submit two *critical* *discussion* questions to the blackboard discussion board reflecting on the reading *before the beginning of each class.* Questions must demonstrate understanding and address the specificity of the readings to receive full credit. “Why did they do this?” is not a valid question.
* *NO EXTRA CREDIT.*
* *NOTE ON PLAGIARISM.* For first offense, student will receive no credit on assignment and no opportunity to make up points. For second offense, student will fail the class. It is the student’s responsibility to read and understand school policy on plagiarism. It is available in the Hunter College Undergraduate catalog. If you are confused, *ask me questions*.

Background/context reports available on Bboard:

- World Inequality Lab *World Inequality Report*

- National Urban League *2016 State of Black America: Locked Out,* Collins et al. *Dreams Deferred*,

- National Partnership for Women and Families “Black Women and the Wage Gap,”

- National Women’s Law Center “The Wage Gap: The How, How, Why, And What to do,”

- Institute for Women’s Policy Research “The Gender Wage Gap 2017,”

- Amy Traub “The Asset Value of Whiteness,”

- Institute for Policy Studies “Off the Deep End”

1.25 – Intro: What is Inequality?

**Pt. 1: Understanding Neoliberalism**

1.29

Read: Jamie Peck *Constructing Neoliberal Reason* Ch. 1, 2

2.1

Read: Jamie Peck *Constructing Neoliberal Reason* Ch. 3

2.5

Read: Jamie Peck *Constructing Neoliberal Reason* Ch. 4, 5

2.8

Read: Melinda Cooper *Family Values* Ch. 1, 2

2.12 College Closed

Read: Melinda Cooper *Family Values* Ch. 3

2.15

Read: Melinda Cooper *Family Values* Ch. 4

2.19

Read: Melinda Cooper *Family Values* Ch. 5

2.22

Read: Melinda Cooper *Family Values* Ch. 6

Complete: **Take-Home Quiz**

**Pt. 2: American histories of race, gender, migration, and class**

2.26

Read: Evelyn Nakano Glenn *Unequal Freedom* Intro, Ch. 1, 2

3.1

Read: Evelyn Nakano Glenn *Unequal Freedom* Ch.3

Complete: **First Paper Due**

3.5

Read: Evelyn Nakano Glenn *Unequal Freedom* Ch. 4

3.8

Read: Evelyn Nakano Glenn *Unequal Freedom* Ch. 5,

3.12

Read: Evelyn Nakano Glenn *Unequal Freedom* Ch. 7

3.15 No Class

Read: Mae Ngai *Impossible Subjects* Ch.1, 2, 4

3.19 No Class

Read: Mae Ngai *Impossible Subjects* Ch.1, 2, 4

3.22

Read: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* Intro, Ch 1, 2

Complete: **Take-Home Quiz**

3.26

Read: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* Ch 3, 4

3.29

Read: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* Ch. 7

Read: Richard Rothstein “The Making of Ferguson”

**Part 2: The Carceral Trap**

4.2

Read: Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish* “The Carceral”

4.5

Read: Ruth W Gilmore “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence”

Read: Ruth W Gilmore “Race, Prisons, and War,”

Complete: **Second Paper Due**

4.9

Read: Marie Gottschalk *Caught* “Introduction,” “The Prison Beyond the Prison”

4.12

Read: Christina Hanhardt *Safe Space* “Introduction”

4.16

Read: Clyde Woods “Katrina’s World: Blues, Bourbon, and the Return to the Source,”

Read: Clyde Woods “Les Miserables of New Orleans: Trap Economics and the Asset-Stripping Blues”

4.19 - 4.28 Spring Break

Read: Gilmore *Golden Gulag*

Read: Alexander Sammon “Elwood, Illinois, Has Become a Vital Hub of America’s Consumer Economy. And it’s Hell”

4.30

Read: Finish *Golden Gulag*

Complete: **Group Presentation**

Complete: **Take-Home Quiz**

5.3

Read: Judah Schept *Progressive Punishment* “Part 1”

5.7

Read: Judah Schept *Progressive Punishment* “Part 2”

5.10

Read: Judah Schept *Progressive Punishment* “Part 3”

5.14

Read: Judah Schept *Progressive Punishment* “Part 4”

Read: China Miéville “On Social Sadism”

5.22

Complete: **Final Paper Due**

**ADA/504 Statement**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that "no otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Enforcement and remedy of grievances are under the jurisdiction of the Office of Civil Rights.

**Office of Diversity and Compliance Statement**

Hunter College is an Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Institution. The College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, disability, genetic predisposition or carrier status, alienage, citizenship, military or veteran status, or status as victim of domestic violence in its student admissions, employment, access to programs, and administration of educational policies. Questions or concerns may be forwarded to the Office of Diversity and Compliance.

**Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated at Hunter College. Students engaging in plagiarism or "cheating" will have formal disciplinary charges brought against them which could result in a course failure, notation on their transcript, and suspension from Hunter. As defined in the [Hunter College Undergraduate Catalog](http://catalog.hunter.cuny.edu/index.php), plagiarism is the borrowing of ideas, terms, statements or knowledge of others without clear and specific acknowledgment. Additionally, copying or obtaining another's answers to questions on examinations or assignments is also a form of academic dishonesty commonly known as "cheating."