

# Class, Status, and Power

Department of Sociology and  
Anthropology: 21:920:332:01  
Department of African American and  
African Studies: 21:014:302  
Fall 2018  
MW 4:00-5:20 PM  
424 Conklin

Professor James Jones  
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Email: james.r.jones@rutgers.edu  
Office Hours: Mondays 5:30-6:30 pm or by  
appointment

This course is about inequality in American society. While there are many approaches to study inequality, we will analyze this problem by examining how the construction of class- and status identities contribute to an unequal social world. That is, we will investigate how individuals go about living their everyday lives and how their lives are structured by their position in the social order thereby exploring the relationship between the micro- and macro-levels. Readings are organized to interrogate American individualism and provide sociological explanations for stratification.

The pedagogical approach to this course is simple- we will study the intimate lives of different socio-economic groups in American society. We will start by observing the lives of elites and then working our way down the socio-economic ladder to understand the lives of those who are less affluent. We will focus on the elites, the middle-class, the working class, and the poor. We will also explore different racial experiences within these groups. Sociological theory will ground the empirical readings for each group. Students will learn to think sociologically about the organization of these social groups. We will compare how individuals spend their time, consume goods, reproduce class and status- based-identities, and perceive their own social positions. Throughout the semester we will thoroughly interrogate the influence of social structure and individual agency in shaping opportunity in American society.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn how to think sociologically and use social theory to understand and explain the social world.
- Learn how different socio-economic groups understand, explain, and express their social position.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance/Participation	10 %
Quizzes	10 %
Response Memos (3)	50 %
Final Exam	30 %

## READINGS

There are four required texts for this course. These books are available at the university bookstore and other major booksellers. All other readings are available on Blackboard.

Currid Halkett, Elizabeth. 2017. *The Sum of Small Things: A theory of the aspirational class*. Princeton: Princeton Press.

Edin, Kathryn and Luke Shafer. 2016 *\$2 a Day: Living on almost nothing in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Lareau, Annette. 2011. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, race and family life*: University of California Press.

Silva, Jennifer. 2015. *Coming Up Short: Working Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*. Oxford: Oxford Press.

## ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

I expect every student to come prepared for each class. This means not only have you read the assigned text but you have synthesized these materials and are prepared for class discussion. I take attendance electronically at the beginning of every class period via Blackboard. You are permitted to miss three classes before unexcused absences are negatively weighted on your final grade.

## RESPONSE MEMOS

We will read sociological scholarship that investigates stratification and identity amongst elites, the middle class, and the lower class in American society. Students will be required to write three response memos critically engaging course readings, one for each socio-economic group. Memos should be one page single spaced. Students are expected to briefly summarize key findings and then provide their own assessments of the work(s). Students should rely on theoretical perspectives covered in class and provide data driven arguments to receive a high score. Memos that simply rearticulate points mentioned in class will be graded poorly. Memos will be graded on originality, logic, content, and grammar.

Response Memo 1 on Elites Due October 8<sup>th</sup>

Response Memo 2 on The Middle Class Due on October 22<sup>nd</sup>

Response Memo 3 on The Working Class Due on November 19<sup>th</sup>

## QUIZZES

During the course of the semester there will be unannounced quizzes at the beginning of the class. These short quizzes evaluate your comprehension of the assigned readings for that class

period. There will be no opportunities to make up quizzes, however, I will not incorporate your lowest two quiz grades into your final grade.

#### FINAL EXAM

There will be a culminative final examination on December 19<sup>th</sup> from 3:00-6:00 PM. A review sheet will be posted online one week prior to the exam. The exam will consist of identifying key terms and completing short- answer essays. If you have a conflict with the date of the exam it is your responsibility to make alternative arrangements with me. I will make alternative arrangements with students who provide at least a two-week notice and have appropriately notified the relevant university officials.

#### COURSE SCHEDULE

##### COURSE INTRODUCTION

September 5<sup>th</sup> First Day of Class

No readings

September 10<sup>th</sup> How to Think Like a Sociologist

“The Promise” in C. Wright Mills’ *the Sociological Imagination*

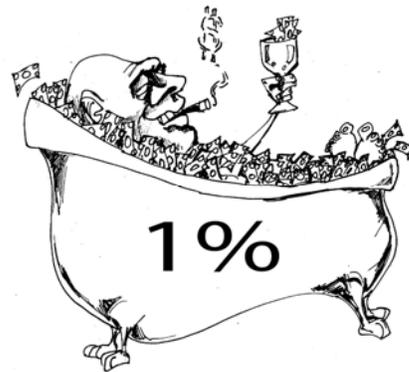
September 12<sup>th</sup> Theorizing Class, Status, and Power

“Class, Status, and Party” Max Weber

##### ELITES

###### Guiding Questions

1. Who are the elites ? How do we measure this group?
2. How doe elites behave? How has their behavior changed?



September 17<sup>th</sup> Elite Theory

Karl Marx

[America’s 1% hasn’t controlled this much wealth since before the Great Depression](#)

September 19<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 1 of Elizabeth Currid Halkett’s *The Sum of Small Things*

September 24<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 3 of Elizabeth Currid Halkett’s *The Sum of Small Things*

September 26<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 4 of Elizabeth Currid Halkett’s *The Sum of Small Things*

[The Age That Women Have Babies: How a Gap Divides America](#)

October 1<sup>st</sup>

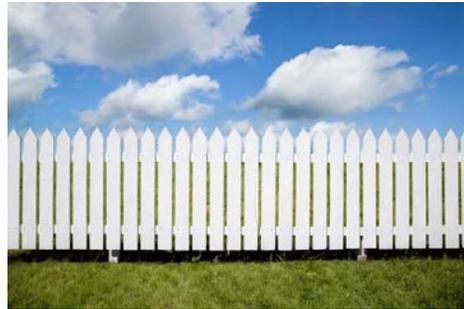
Chapter 5 of Elizabeth Currid Halkett's *The Sum of Small Things*

October 3<sup>rd</sup>

Chapter 2 (Immigration, Hyper-Selectivity, and Second Generation Convergence) from Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou's *Asian American Achievement Paradox*

## THE MIDDLE CLASS

1. [Guiding Questions](#)  
Who is the middle class?
2. How do middle class families reproduce their class position and erect boundaries between different racial and class groups?
3. How does race and racism shape middle class experiences?



October 8<sup>th</sup> [Unequal Childhoods](#)

Chapter 2 of Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*

October 10<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 3 of Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*

October 15<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 6 of Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*

October 17<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 9 of Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*

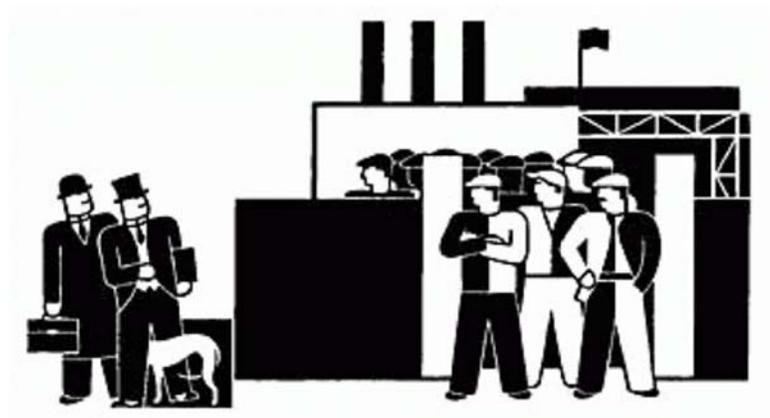
October 22<sup>nd</sup> – [Black Picket Fences](#)

Chapter 3 (Generations through a Changing Economy) from Mary Pattillo's *Black Picket Fences*

## THE WORKING CLASS

### [Guiding Questions](#)

1. Why isn't their solidarity between individuals who share similar class positions?
2. How does race shape class identities?
3. How do children from working class families behave differently from middle class children?
4. How has the lives of working class adults changes over the past decades?



October 24<sup>th</sup> Theories of Race and Class

Excerpts from W.E.B. DuBois' *Black Reconstruction* and Peggy McIntosh "White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack"

October 29<sup>th</sup> Working Class White

Excerpts from Monica McDermott's *Working Class White*

October 31<sup>st</sup>

Excerpts from Monica McDermott's *Working Class White*

November 5<sup>th</sup> – Feeling Left Behind

Excerpts from Arlie Hochschild *Strangers in Their Own Land*

November 7<sup>th</sup> Coming Up Short

Chapter 2 of Jennifer Silva's *Coming Up Short*

November 12<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 3 of Jennifer Silva's *Coming Up Short*

November 14<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 4 of Jennifer Silva's *Coming Up Short*

November 19<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 5 of Jennifer Silva's *Coming Up Short*

## THE POOR

### Guiding Questions

1. What shapes the life situation of those living in poverty?
2. Is Social structure or individual agency more influential in determining life chances?
3. Are those dynamics similar to and different from the situations that shape the lives of the affluent?
4. What would it take to eliminate extreme poverty in American society?



November 26<sup>th</sup> Theories of Poverty and Stratification

Herbert Gans "The Functions of Poverty" and Wilbert Moore and Kingsley Davis "Principles of Stratification"

November 28<sup>th</sup> Living on \$2 a Day

Chapter 1 of Kathryn Edin and Luke Shafer's *\$2 A Day*

December 3<sup>rd</sup>

Chapter 2 of Kathryn Edin and Luke Shafer's *\$2 A Day*

December 5<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 3 of Kathryn Edin and Luke Shafer's *\$2 A Day*

December 10<sup>th</sup>

Chapter 4 of Kathryn Edin and Luke Shafer's *\$2 A Day*

December 12<sup>th</sup> Final Class

*Review session- No Reading*

DECEMBER 19<sup>TH</sup> FINAL EXAM 3:00-6:00PM

## CLASS POLICIES

### BLACKBOARD

All class communication will be through Blackboard. **This syllabus is subject to revision and updated version will be posted to the course site.** Please check the site regularly for notification. All assignments must be submitted through Blackboard.

### ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is required. There will be no make-up opportunities for missed classes.

Excused vs. Unexcused absences: [The Rutgers-Newark Undergraduate catalog](#)

The recognized grounds for absence are illness requiring medical attention, curricular or extracurricular activities approved by the faculty, personal obligations claimed by the student and recognized as valid, recognized religious holidays, and severe inclement weather causing dangerous traveling conditions.” If you plan to claim a religious holiday as an excused absence, you must inform me of this fact within the first two weeks of class.

### ELECTRONICS POLICY

Electronic media is a welcome tool to aid learning in the modern classroom. However, used irresponsibly it can also be detrimental to learning when students lose the ability to focus on lectures or distract other students with it. Use of electronic media is therefore a student privilege, not a right, and may be revoked by the instructor under certain conditions. During class time certain electronic media—laptop computers and tablets, not cell phones—may be used only for the following purposes:

- 1) to read required course texts (E-books or texts posted on Blackboard)
- 2) to type notes on lectures and classroom discussions

Electronic media may NOT be used to browse the internet, answer email, check social media, or for any use that is not directly related to the course. If any student is found to be in violation of the electronics policy—as witnessed by the instructor or as reported by fellow classmates—that student will be banned from using any electronic media for the remainder of the course. If the student continues to use electronic media despite the ban, his or her final grade will be reduced a full letter grade at the conclusion. In extreme cases I reserve the right to ban the student from the classroom altogether. The student will be notified in writing if s/he has lost the privilege of using electronic media. Cell phones must be turned off during class time or set to “vibrate”.

### PLAGIARISM POLICY

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, for which a student may receive a range of punishments, including failing the course, a permanent record on his or her final transcript, suspension or even expulsion from the University. Please familiarize yourself with the University's definition of plagiarism by reviewing the Rutgers University Policy on Academic Integrity, here: <http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/plagiarism>.

If I suspect any student of plagiarism I will bring it to his/her attention and report it to the administration. We faculty have a professional obligation to report all instances of plagiarism in our classes. Failure to do so promotes inequity among the student body, given that honest students have not had the advantage of using external sources in preparing their work.

All students are required to sign the Rutgers Honor Code Pledge. To receive credit, every assignment must have your signature under the following phrase: **"On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this assignment."**

#### DISABILITY SERVICES AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. For more information please contact Kate Torres at [\(973\)353-5375](tel:9733535375) or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting [odsnewark@rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu).