San José State University  
Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences  
Soci. 165: Poverty, Wealth, and Privilege, Section 1, Spring 2019

Course and Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Scott Myers-Lipton  
Office Location: DMH 210  
Telephone: 408-924-5761  
Email: smlipton@sjsu.edu  
Office Hours: Tu. & Th., 10:25-11:25 am  
Class Days/Time: Tu. & Th., 12-1:15 pm  
Classroom: DMH 226A  
Prerequisites: SOCI 1 or equivalent

Course Description

According to the course catalog, Sociology 165 is “[A]n examination of the causes and consequences of inequality along the dimensions of social class, race/ethnicity, gender, citizenship status, and/or sexualities. The approach will be local, national, and international.”

This class will explore why the USA has such a high level of poverty, what is the relationship between its high poverty rate and it being the wealthiest nation in the world, why is inequality increasing between the wealthy and the poor, and what are various solutions to this poverty and excessive inequality. This semester will also include a section on the rise of economic nationalism, the “Alt-Right”, and Donald Trump, and their connection to inequality.

Note that Sociologists are interested in examining social or public problems and solutions. As the renowned sociologist C. Wright Mills stated, “personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues - and in terms of the problems of history making.” For example, if in a nation, there is just a small minority of the population in poverty, then it is the individual’s personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the person and her or his skills. But if in that nation, there are 43 million people in poverty (15% of the population), then that is a social problem, and relief must come from a change in social structure (i.e., the arrangement of society). Mills called this approach to understanding reality the sociological imagination, which we will use throughout this course.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify the various components of social class.
2. Analyze data on stratification using quintiles and the gini co-efficient.
3. Explain why income and wealth inequality has increased in the USA.
4. Evaluate various solutions to income and wealth inequality.

Required Texts/Readings

Textbook

Other Readings
There is a reader for this course. The reader is available at San Jose Copies (408-297-6698), which is located on 109 E. Santa Clara Street, two stores down from the Chevron gas station.

Course Requirements and Assignments
Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

This course has four course requirements: quizzes, exams, a creative project, and participation.

8 Very Short Quizzes (20% of total grade)
The purpose of these very short quizzes (i.e., less than 5 minutes) is to encourage reading. In order to encourage the reading process, you will be given short quizzes throughout the semester. If you do the reading for each class, these short quizzes will be very easy to answer.

Two Exams in Class (20% each, 40% of total grade)
The exams are your opportunity to demonstrate that you have done the reading, thought about it deeply, and can explain it.

Creative Project (20%)
The creative project provides an opportunity to explore an issue from the course through a video, drawing, poster board, poetry, photography, or music. You will also write a 1-page overview of your creative project.

Participation (20%)
The purpose of evaluating your participation is to encourage and reward students who come to class prepared to discuss and engage with the reading. Your participation grade will be based on the following criteria:

   Excellence (A) requires that you play a leadership role in the classroom discussion. This leadership role includes reading and thoughtfully considering the text, discussing points articulately and responding intelligently to other's views, asking insightful questions, and taking responsibility for the overall quality of the conversation.

   Above average (B) requires that you participate regularly in the classroom discussions, demonstrate good knowledge of the text, discuss points articulately and respond intelligently to other's views; work to achieve understanding, listen to other viewpoints, ask sound questions, but you do not take a strong leadership role in the overall class discussion.

   Average (C) requires that you follow the discussion actively in the classroom, make occasional comments, have a basic knowledge of the text, and sometimes ask questions.

   Below average (D) requires that you occupy a seat and occasionally show signs of life.

   Failure (F) requires that you occupy a seat but show no signs of life.
At the end of the course, you will be asked to evaluate your level of participation. This evaluation will be taken seriously when participation grades are determined.

**Final Examination or Evaluation**

In this class, the final will be a final exam.

**Grading Information**

Since the various parts of the course add up to 100%, each percent equals a point. For example, your participation is 20% of your grade; thus, this assignment is worth 20 points. The scale that I use to measure your work is the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
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<tr>
<td>93-97</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
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<td>59 &amp; below</td>
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**EXTRA CREDIT: SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT**

Students who want to receive extra credit can be involved in a service-learning project focused on poverty and income inequality, and requires a 1-2 hour commitment per week throughout the semester. Students will be required to keep track of your hours in a log. In addition, you will be required to write 3-4 paragraphs about what you are learning in your project, to be turned in on the first of each month. If the service-learning hours and reflection papers are completed, students will receive a minimum of a 1/3rd to a full grade increase on your final grade, depending on the quality of the work.

There will also be other extra credit opportunities throughout the semester. To receive the extra credit, you need to go to the campus event, and then write 3-4 paragraphs reflection paper: (1) describing what you saw and heard (i.e., the major points and key lessons of the event), and (2) integrating your insights with the reading in Wealth, Poverty, and Privilege. If you do this, you will receive +2 on a quiz score and if you don’t, you will receive +1.5 or less. They must be turned in 1 week after the event. If not, they will receive +1 on a quiz score (or less). You can go to a total of 5 extra credit events.

**Classroom Protocol**

1. **Cell Phones and Computers:** All cell phones are BANNED from this classroom. Please do not have them out. If you have a cell phone out during class, I will give you a warning, and then the next time it is out, I will ask you to leave the class for the day. You are free to return the following class, of course, without the cell phone. In addition, any type of networking on the computer is not allowed. If you use your computer, and it is open to Facebook, gmail, etc, I will give you one warning, and then ask you to leave the class if it occurs again.

2. **Office Hours:** My office hours are on Tuesday and Thursdays. Office hours are generally used to help clarify information from lectures, discussions, group activities, readings, essays, or social action projects. However, at least once this semester, I would appreciate it if you stopped by my office so that I can get to know you better on a personal basis.

**University Policies**

Per University Policy S16-9 [http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf], relevant information to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. is available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs’ Syllabus Information web page at [http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/)
Course Schedule

Week 1:
1/24  Discuss Syllabus and Course

Week 2:
1/29  Social Class
               Alhanti, “Which Income Class are You?”, p. 4-6
               Eitzen and Johnson, “Social Class in America”, p. 7-8
               Scott and Leonard, “Shadowy Lines…”, p. 8-12

1/31  Stratification and Quintiles
      READER:  What Divides Us, p. 13-15
               Investopedia, “Quintiles”, p. 16
               Ginsburgh, “Incomes & Inequality”, p. 17-21
               Advisor Persp., “Real Average Household Income”, p. 22
               Statista, “Shares of Household Income of Quintiles…”, p. 23
               Politics That Work, “% Change in Income 1980-2013”, p. 24

Week 3:
2/5  USA is #1: Income, Wealth, Poverty, and more!
      READER:  Gongloff, “The U.S. Has the Worst Income Inequality”, p. 25-26
               Sherman, “America is the Richest and Most Unequal…”, p. 27-28
               Melendez, “American Number One in Wealth”, p. 29-30
               Buchheit, “Numbers are Staggering: US is World Leader”, p. 31-32
               Margolis, “California Ranks as Poorest State…”, p. 33-34

      Video:  We are #1, Jon Stewart

2/7  Income Inequality
      READER:  Peterson, “McDonald’s and Starbucks CEO Make More”, p. 35
               Saez, “US Top 1 Percent…” p. 36-37
               Thomas, “How Do We Know Income Inequality…”, 38-40
               Stewart, “One Chart That Shows…”, p. 41-42
               Our World in Data, “Redistribution through Tax-…”, p. 43-45
               Kendall, “Income Inequality in the Bay Area…”, p. 46-47
               Castañeda, “Silicon Valley Wages have Dropped…”, p. 48-49
Week 4:
2/12  Wealth Inequality

READER:  
Amadeo, “What is Average American Net Worth?”, p. 50-53  
Ingraham, “The richest 1 percent now owns…”, p. 54-58  
Thompson, How You, I, and Everyone…”, p. 59-62  
Hjelmaard, “Vast Majority of New Wealth Last Year…”, p. 63-64  
Vlastelica, Why Income Inequality is Holding Back…”, p. 65-66  
Schleifer, There are 143 Tech Billionaires…”, p. 67-68

Simulation: Steps and wealth chairs and ThinkReality video

2/14  Extreme Inequality Analysis: Capitalism and Its Changes

READER:  
Johnson, “The Forest and The Trees”, p. 69-72  
Roberts, “The Offshoring Outsourcing of American Jobs”, p. 75-76  
Cocco, “Most US Manufacturing Jobs Lost to Technology”, p. 77  
Myers-Lipton, “The Early Republic & Pre-Civil War”, p. 78-82

Video: Capitalism: A Love Story / Frontline: A Divided Class

Week 5:
2/19  5th Quintile: The Bottom 20%, The Poor

READER:  
Grimes, “What Poor Feels Like”, p. 83-84  
Poverty In the US, p. 85-87  
US Census Bureau, “Definition of Poverty”, p. 88-89  
Thompson, “What is Poverty”, p. 90-92  

Video: 60 minutes / ABC Diane Sawyer

2/21  The Bottom of the 5th Quintile: People Without Homes

READER:  
Day, “Number of Homeless People in America…”, p. 100  
Mello “1 in 10 CSU Students Say They’ve Been…”, p. 103-106  
Press Release: 13.2% of SJSU Students Have Been…”, p. 107  
Lee, Tyler, & Wright, “The New Homeless Revisited”, p. 108-118

Week 6:
2/26  2nd to 4th Quintiles: Working and Middle Classes, and Social Mobility

READER:  
EPI: “January 2018 Median Household Income”, p. 119-120  
Pew Research, “The American Class Loses…”, p. 121-123  
White, “So Long, Middle Class…”, 124-125  
Lunby, “Why America’s Middle Class is Losing…”, p. 126-128  
Avalos, “Income High but at What Price?”, p. 129  
Egan, “No Degree and Now Way Back”, 130-131  
Semuels, “Poor at 20, Poor for Life”, p. 132-133
2/28 Extreme Inequality Analysis: The .01% Plan

         Fortune 500 Graphs, p. 138-142
         Gilson, “It’s Not the 1 Percent Controlling Politics…”, p. 143-144
         McKibben, “The Koch Brothers’ New Brand”, p. 145-152

Video: Born Rich

Week 7:
3/5 Extreme Inequality Analysis: Tax Policy (Bush to Obama to Trump to AOC)

         NY Times, Graph: “Effective Income Tax Rates”, p. 159
         Senate Joint Committee, “A Millionaire’s Tax Rate”, p. 160
         EPI: “The US Economy is Not Suffering…”, p. 161
         BBC: “US Tax Bill: Winners and Losers”, p. 164-166
         Bryan, “Here is Who Will Win and Lose…”, p. 167-168
         Harwood, “Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez has Kick-Started…”, p. 174-175

Video: Inequality in America, Reich on marginal tax rates

3/7 Extreme Inequality Analysis: Minimum Wage

READER: Cooper, “The Federal Minimum Wage Has…”, p. 176-177
         Noguchi, “Measure Set Sights on Wage Increase”, p. 182
         Dean, “Student Activism as the Tip of the Spear”, p. 183-185
         EPI: “The US Economy Can Afford…”, p. 188-189
         Jacobsen, “Donald Trump gets a Full Flop…”, p. 190-191

Week 8:
3/12 Extreme Inequality Analysis: Unions

READER: Semuels, “Fewer Unions, Lower Pay…”, p. 192-194
         Fairchild, “Middle Class Decline…”, p. 196-197
         EPI, “When Workers Have More Leverage…”, p. 198-199
         Eidelsen, “Union Power Is Putting Pressure on…”, p. 200-202
         Schmitt and Zipperer, “UnionBusting is Big…”, p. 203-204
         Liptak, “Supreme Court Ruling Delivers”, p. 205-207

Video: The High Price of Low Prices

3/14 IN-CLASS, EXAM #1
Week 9:
3/19 Extreme Inequality Analysis: Intersectionality—Race and Class
READER: Definitions of Racism, p. 208
King, Speech at the 10th Anniversary Convention…”, p. 209
Myers-Lipton, “Smith, Carlos and the Statues”, p. 210-211
Hanks, et al., “Systematic Inequality” , p. 212-221
Carrig, “Study Asians Displace Blacks…”, p. 222-224

3/21 Extreme Inequality Analysis: Intersectionality—Race, Class, & Gender
Washington Center, “Gender Wage Inequality in US”, p. 228-231
McCullock, “Closing the Women’s Wealth Gap,” p. 232-244

Week 10:
3/26 3 Major Events Highlight Extreme Inequality – Katrina, Occupy, BLM
READER: Quigley, “New Orleans Pain Index…”, p. 245-246
West, “Exiles from a City and from a Nation,” p. 247-248
Quigley, “How to Destroy an African American …”, p. 249-253
Gelder, “This Changes Everything”, p. 254-256
McCrie, “Protests Over Michael Brown”, p. 257-258

3/28 The 4th Event: Trump and Economic Nationalism
Green, “It was Cultural Anxiety that Drove…”, p. 261-262
Carnes and Lupu, “It is Time to Bust the Myth”, p. 263-265
Nelson, “Steve Bannon Hails Trump’s …”, p. 266-267
USA Today, “Trump’s ‘America’s First’ Nationalism…”, p. 268
Kopf, “Trump’s new chief Economist is Known…”, p. 269-270

Week 11:
4/9 An Economic Bill of Rights: Right to a Job
BOOK: Prologue, ix-xv, Ch. 1, p. 1-18
READER: Aronoff, All of a Sudden, Adding “Green”…”, p. 271-274

4/11 The Right to a Living Wage
BOOK: Myers-Lipton, Ch. 2, p. 23-32: Problem & History Section

Week 12:
4/16 Ending Extreme Inequality: Living Wage (students choose campaign to discuss)
BOOK: Myers-Lipton, Chapter 2, p. 32-41: Current Approaches

4/18 Ending Extreme Inequality: The Right to Decent Housing
BOOK: Myers-Lipton, Chapter 3, p. 43-55: Problem & History
Week 13:
4/23  Ending Extreme Inequality: Housing (students choose)

BOOK:  Myers-Lipton, Chapter 3, p. 55-64: Current Approaches
READER:  Alcindor, “Don’t Make Housing For the Poor Too Cozy”, p. 275-277

4/25  DUE: Creative Project

Week 14:
4/30  Ending Extreme Inequality: The Right to a Good Education

BOOK:  Myers-Lipton, Chapter 4, p. 65-83, Problem & History
Video: From First to Worst

5/2  Ending Extreme Inequality: The Right to a Good Education (students choose)

BOOK:  Myers-Lipton, Chapter 4: Current Approaches, p. 83-93
READER:  Nazaryan, “DeVos Is Coming for Your Public Schools”, p. 278-284

Week 15:
5/7  Ending Extreme Inequality: Right to Adequate Medical Care

BOOK:  Myers-Lipton, Chapter 5

5/9  Epilogue

BOOK:  Myers-Lipton, Epilogue

Video: The Matrix

5/20 (Mon)  FINALS: IN-CLASS, EXAM #2
9:45 am-noon
DMH 226A