

San José State University
Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences
Soci. 165: Poverty, Wealth, and Privilege, Section 1, Spring 2020

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Dr. Scott Myers-Lipton
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Office Hours:	Tu. & Th., 12 pm-1 pm
Class Days/Time:	Tu. & Th., 9-10:15 am
Classroom:	Clark Hall 234
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.” In light of the catalog description, this class will explore what are the implications of the top 0.1% controlling as much wealth as the bottom 90% in the USA, why is inequality increasing between the wealthy and the poor, what is the relationship between the USA’s high poverty rate and it being the wealthiest nation in the world, and what are various solutions to our excessive inequality and poverty.

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.¹

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.

¹ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 226.

Required Texts/Readings

Textbook

The textbook is by Scott Myers-Lipton, and is entitled *Ending Extreme Inequality: An Economic Bill of Rights to End Poverty* (ISBN: 10: 9781612057279). It is available at Spartan Bookstore or on-line.

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.

Eight 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.

One Take-Home Exam and Two In-class Exams (20% each; 60% of total grade)

The three exams are your opportunity to demonstrate that you have done the reading, thought about it deeply, and can explain it.

Creative Project (10%)

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 (10%)

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 exam 1 is 20% of your grade; thus, this assignment is worth 20 points. The scale that I use to measure your work is the following:

98-100=A+	88-89=B+	78-79=C+	68-69=D+	59 & below =F
93-97=A	83-87=B	73-77=C	63-67=D	
90-92=A-	80-82=B-	70-72=C-	60-62=D-	

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:* Please do NOT use your cell phone once the class starts. If you need to answer a text, step outside and do so. In addition, any type of social networking on your computer is NOT allowed. If you use your computer to take notes or do the reading, do not have it also open to Facebook, gmail, etc. This makes me very unhappy, as it is a block to your participation, as well as the group process.

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/>

Soci. 165 / Poverty, Wealth, and Privilege / Spring, 2020

Course Schedule

WEEK 1:

1/23 DISCUSS SYLLABUS AND CLASS

WEEK 2:

1/28 SOCIAL CLASS

Reader:

Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave", p. 1-3
Alhanati, "Which Income Class...?", p. 4-6
Frankenfield, "Which Income Class...?", p. 7-15
HM Harcort, "What Divides Us: Stratification", p. 16-17

1/30 QUINTILES AND THE TOP 1% & .1%

Reader:

Investopedia, "Quintiles", p. 18
Ginsburgh, "Incomes & Inequality: Executive Summary", p. 19-23
EPI: Graph, "Cumulative Percent Change in Real Annual Wages, by Wage Group...", p. 24
Advisor Perspective: Graph, "Real (Inflation-Adjusted) Average Household Income", p. 25
Thomas, "How Do We Know Income Inequality is Getting Worse?", p. 26-28

Video: Capitalism: A Love Story

WEEK 3:

2/4 USA INCOME INEQUALITY: WE ARE #1

Reader:

Gongloff, "U.S. Has the Worst Income Inequality in the Developed World...", p. 29-30
Leonard, "Our Broken Economy, in One Simple Chart", p. 31-33
Stewart, "One Chart that Shows How Much Worse Income Inequality is in America...", p. 34-35
Peterson, "McDonald's & Starbucks CEOs Make More than \$9,200...", p. 36
Washington Center, "Gender Wage Inequality in the United States", p. 37-40
Kendall, "Income Inequality in the Bay Area is Among Nation's Highest", p. 41-42
Ingraham, "How Rising Inequality Hurts Everyone, Even the Rich", p. 43-45

Video: We are #1, Jon Stewart

2/6 USA WEALTH INCOME INEQUALITY: WE ARE #1

Reader:

Sherman, "America is the Richest, and Most Unequal, Country", p. 46-47
Bruenig, "Top 1% Up \$21 Trillion. Bottom 50% Down \$900 Billion", p. 48-49
Hjelmgaard, "Vast Majority of New Wealth Last Year Went to Top 1%", p. 50
Amadeo, "What is Average American Net Worth?", p. 51-54
Kirsch, "The 3 Richest Americans Hold More Wealth Than Bottom 50%...", p. 55-56
Thompson, "The Racial Wealth Gap: Addressing America's Most Pressing Epidemic", p. 57-58
Ingraham, "The Richest 1 Percent Now Owns More of the Country's Wealth..." p. 59-63
Thompson, "How You, I, and Everyone Got the Top 1 Percent All Wrong", p. 64-67

WEEK 4

2/11 USA POVERTY HISTORY: Native American Contributions to Egalitarianism; Early Republic & Pre-Civil War America; After the Civil War

Reader: Myers-Lipton, p. 68-84

Video: ABC Diane Sawyer

2/13 USA POVERTY HISTORY: The (Un) Progressive Era; Great Depression & New Deal

Reader: Myers-Lipton, p. 85-102

WEEK 5:

2/18 USA POVERTY HISTORY: War on Poverty; Dismantling New Deal & War on Poverty

Reader: Myers-Lipton, p. 103-123

2/20 TODAY'S POOR (BOTTOM 20%) : U.S. is 'World Leader' in Child Poverty

Reader:

Edelman, "A Prayer to End Child Poverty", p. 124-125
Edelman, "Ending Child Poverty Now", p. 126-127
Graph, Childhood Poverty, p. 128
UNM Open Library, "Explaining Poverty" p. 129-135
UC Davis, "How is Poverty Measured in the United States?", p. 136-137
Santa Clara County Housing Authority, "Income Limits", p. 138
Graphs, "Poverty Rates", p. 139-140
Sauter, Faces of Poverty", p. 141-147

Video: 60 minutes

WEEK 6:

2/25 HOUSELESS: People Without Homes

Reader:

Cooper, "Rent is Obscene Here", p. 148-153

Graff, CSU Shocker, Up to 57,000 students Homeless, p. 154-155

Deruy, "Shocking Number of Homeless Students in San Jose Sparks Outrage", p. 156-158

Martin, "Silicon Valley Housing Shortage Worsens for Lowest Income Earners", p. 159-160

Deruy, "San Jose: 42% Spike in Homeless Population", p. 161-162

National Law Center, "Homelessness in America: Overview of Data and Causes", p. 163-165

Jaggi, "The Many Forms of Homelessness", p. 166

DUE: Take-Home Exam 1

Video: SHA

2/27 BOTTOM 60%: Working and Middle Classes (4th and 3rd Quintiles)

Reader:

Tavernise, With His Jobs Gone, an Autoworker Wonders, "What Am I as a Man?", p. 167-172

White, "So Long, Middle Class: Middle-Income Jobs are Disappearing the Fastest", p. 173-174

Krause & Sawhill, "7 Reasons to worry about the American Middle Class", p. 175-188

Kochhar, "The American Middle is Stable in Size, but Losing Ground...", p. 189-193

Video: A Divided Class

WEEK 7:

3/3 CAPITALISM: Changes in Past 40 years

Reader:

Johnson, "Forest and the Trees: Sociology as Life, Practice, and Promise", p. 194-197

Cole, "The Globalization of Capitalism", p. 198-199

Amadeo, "Six Problems with NAFTA", p. 200-201

Buchwald, "China's Entrance into WTO Costs US 3.4 Million Jobs, New Study Finds", p. 202-203

Burton, "Hedge-fund Billionaire Ray Dalio Says Capitalism Needs Urgent Reform", p. 204-206

Svat, "Capitalism Isn't Broken", It's Working All Too Well", p. 207-208

Video: Frontline: Left Behind / Life and Debt

3/5 .01 (and .1) PLAN

Reader:

Domhoff, "Who Rules America", p. 209-212

Fortune 500 Graphs, p. 213-215

CBS News, "Top 15 on the Fortune 500", p. 216-217

Fortune, "List of Largest Corporations by Revenue", p. 218

Gilson, "It's Not the 1 Percent Controlling Politics. It's the .01 Percent", p. 219-220

McKibben, The Koch Brothers New Brand", p. 221-228

Video: Born Rich

WEEK 8:

3/10 TAX POLICY

Reader:

Ingraham, "For the First Time in History...", p. 229-231

Myers, "91 profitable Fortune 500 companies paid \$0...", p. 232-234

NY Times, "Tilting the Tax System in Favor of the Rich", p. 235-239

NY Times: Graph, "Effective Income Tax Rates", p. 240

Senate Joint Comm., "A Millionaire's Tax Rate, Now and Then", p. 241

Salisbury, "What Really Happened to Your Taxes While Obama Was President", p. 242-243

Our World, "Redistribution through Tax-and-Transfer Policies", p. 244-245

3/12 MINIMUM WAGE

Reader:

Leonhardt, What it's Like Trying to Live on Minimum Wage, p. 246-249

Cooper, "Congress Has Never Let the Federal Minimum Wage Erode For This Long", p. 250

Zipperer: "The Erosion of the Federal Minimum Wage Has Increase Poverty...", p. 251-252

Thompson, "How Students in San Jose Raised the Minimum Wage", p. 253-255

Giwargis, "SJ Council Approves \$15 Minimum Wage", p. 256

Tedeschi, Pay is Rising Fastest for Low Earners", p. 257-258

Cooper, "Raising Federal Wage to \$15 by 2025 Would Lift Wages for Over 33...", p. 259-261

Matthews, "The Economic Debate Over the Minimum Wage Explained", p. 262-268

Video: Walk the Walk

WEEK 9:

3/17 UNIONS

Reader:

Pearce, "Red-State Revolt Continues", p. 269-271

Eidelsen, "Union Power Is Putting Pressure on Silicon Valleys' Tech Giants", p. 272-274

DeRuy, "San Jose: Community Advocates Lay Out Demands for Google", p. 275-276

Samuels, "Fewer Unions, Lower Pay For Everyone", p. 277-279

Schmitt and Zipperer, "Union Busting is Big Business," p. 280-281

Graph: Public vs. Private Sector Union Rate...", p. 282

Fairchild, "Middle Class Decline Mirrors the Fall of Unions in One Chart", p. 283-284

EPI, "When Workers Have More Leverage, Income Growth is More Equal", p. 285-286

Video: The High Price of Low Prices

3/19 TRUMP'S "AMERICAN CARNAGE"

Reader:

Gillon, "Why Are So Many White Men So Angry", p. 287-290

Fredericks, "Trump Dredges Up 'Mexican Rapists Comment...'", p. 291-292

Reuters, "I Will Be the Greatest Jobs President that God has Ever Created': Trump", p. 293-294

Beauchamp, "A New Study Reveals the Reason Obama Voters Switched to Trump", p. 295

Graphs, "Education and Race", "Education Among Whites by Sex", p. 296-297

Rucker, Wagner & Fahrenthold "Trump Takes Office, Vows an End to American Carnage", p. 298-301

Bouie, "The Meaning of American Carnage", p. 302-303

O'Neil, "Here's Trump Hating on America", p. 304-306

Video: What Trump Thinks of Americans

WEEK 10:

3/24 TRUMP'S RESPONSE to "AMERICAN CARNAGE"

Reader:

Amadeo, "President Donald Trump's Economic Plan", p. 307-314

Kucik, "Trump Tariffs: How the Trade Wars Are Affecting Manufacturing Jobs...", p. 315-316

Gomez, "All the Ways President Trump is Cutting Legal Immigration", p. 317-320

BBC: "Migrant Children in the US: The Bigger Picture Explained", p. 321-325

Scott, "GOP Tax Law's Lopsided Giveaway to Corps, Explained in 1 Sentence", p. 326-327

Jacobsen, "Donald Trump Gets a Full Flop for Stance on Minimum Wage", p. 328-329

Video: Frontline

3/26 EXAM 2 (In-Class)

March 30-April 3: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 11:

4/7 SOLUTION TO INCOME AND WEALTH INEQUALITY: Tax Reform

Reader:

Glenn, "Ocasio-Cortez's 70-percent Tax Rate," p. 330-332
Saez & Zucman, "Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Tax Hike Idea is Not About Soaking...", p. 333-335
Chapman, "AOC Wants to Soak the Rich.", p. 336-337
Stein and Ingraham, "Elizabeth Warren to Propose New 'Wealth Tax' on Very...", p. 338-341
Cassidy, "Why Elizabeth Warren's Wealth Tax Would Work", p. 342-346
Maggiulli, "Are Wealth Taxes a Good Idea", p. 347-353

Video: AOC and Warren

4/9 SOLUTION TO WEALTH INEQUALITY: Reparations

Reader:

Gonzalez, "Report: 10 Strategies to Address Structural Forces Behind Racial...", p. 354-355
Syndicated, "As a Nation Built on Slave Labor, it is Time to Finally Talk about...", p. 356-358
Malveaux, "HR-40 and the Promise of Reparations for African Americans", p. 359-361
Coates, "Ta-Nehisi Coates' Testimony on Reparations", p. 362-363
Robinson, "Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Struggle for Reparations", p. 364-368
Cohen, "What Reparations for Slavery Might Look Like in 2019", p. 369-372

WEEK 12:

4/14 SOLUTION TO INCOME INEQUALITY: Federal Job Guarantee (Right to a Job)

Reader:

Kopf, "Trump's New Chief Economist is Known for Arguing that US Inequality...", p. 373-374

Book:

Myers-Lipton, "Prologue: ix-xv, Ch. 1, p. 1-8, 11-18

4/16 SOLUTION TO INCOME INEQUALITY: A Green New Deal

Reader:

Hess, "AOC's Green New Deal Includes a Federal Jobs Guarantee...", p. 375-376
Witt, "The Optimistic Activists for a Green New Deal", p. 377-382
Irfan, "The Green New Deal is Fracturing a Critical Base for Democrats: Unions", p. 383-387
Haskins, "Green New Deal would destroy American Dream, Create...", p. 388-390

Video: AOC on the Green New Deal

WEEK 13:

4/21 SOLUTION TO INEQUALITY: A Living Wage (students choose campaign)

Book:

Myers-Lipton, Ch. 2, p. 23-25, 32-41

4/23 SOLUTION TO INEQUALITY: Right to Decent Housing (students choose)

Reader:

Alcindor, “Don’t Make Housing For the Poor Too Cozy, Carson Warns”, p. 391-393

Book:

Myers-Lipton, Chapter 3, p. 43-46, 55-64

WEEK 14:

4/28 SOLUTION TO INEQUALITY: Right to a Good Education (students choose)

Reader:

Nazaryan, “ DeVos Is Coming for Your Public Schools”, p. 394-400

Book:

Myers-Lipton, Chapter 4, p. 65-72, 83-93 Problem & History

Video: From First to Worst

4/30 DUE: Creative Project

WEEK 15:

5/5 SOLUTIONS TO INEQUALITY: Right to Adequate Medical Care

Reader:

Scott, "The Trump Administration Latest Steps to Undermine the ACA, Explained", p. 401-403

Book:

Myers-Lipton, p. 95-98, 109-119

5/7 EPILOGUE: Where Do We Go From Here?

Reader:

Myers-Lipton, "Dr. King's Legacy For Today", p. 404-406

King, "Where Do We Go From Here", p. 407-418

Book:

Myers-Lipton, Epilogue

5/19 FINAL: EXAM 3 (In-Class)

Tu.: 7:15 am-9:30 am
