

Spring 2009
 Dr. Lois West
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SYLLABUS for SYD 4530: Social Inequality

Description: How does what looks like the current “melt-down” of contemporary capitalism affect people sociologically? It creates greater social inequalities of wealth and power. This course provides a sociological perspective on the current global economic crisis. We begin and end with economic effects on an everyday, grass-roots level. But we also analyze the macrosociology of what Reich calls “supercapitalism.” Should society and government play a role in mitigating economic and social inequalities when economies sink into recession or even depression? What should our roles as citizens be?

Required Readings: The following texts can be purchased at the university bookstore, local book stores or on-line and they are all in paperback:

- 1). Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed, Holt Paperbacks; Reprint edition 2008.
- 2). Andrew G. Johnson, Privilege, Power and Difference, McGraw Hill 2005.
- 3). Robert B. Reich, Supercapitalism, Vintage Books 2007.
- 4). Viviana A. Zelizer, The Social Meaning of Money, Princeton University Press, 1997.
- 5). Murray Milner, Freaks, Geeks and Cool Kids, Routledge Press, 2006.

Recommended: Dan Smith, The Penguin State of the World Atlas, Eighth Edition, Penguin Books 2008.

Richard H. Robbins, Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism, Allyn and Bacon, 2008, 7th edition.

Requirements: Successful completion of the following assignments done **on time** (assignments turned in late will not be accepted; no make-ups):

1. In class oral **presentations of the required readings** (4 worth 5 points each, 20 points total). If you are not here the date your reading is due, you will not receive points. Students can earn extra credit with extra presentations.
 2. Essay **exam #1 on the readings** (3 questions @ ten points each, 30 points)
 3. A **research project with a research bibliography (20 sources each presented to the class)** (20 points)
 4. Essay **exam #2** on the readings (3 questions worth ten points each, 30 points)
- Final points add up to 100 possible (20+30+20+30=100)

NOTE: I do not accept emailed assignments. You must turn in a hard copy in class or in my box in the sociology department on the due date.

Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction to the sociology of wealth and power. Part Two of the Penguin Atlas

Recommended: Penguin Atlas.

Week 2-Week 3: How do poor people survive? Ehrenreich's take—video and book.
Required Reading. Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed all.

No class January 19--Martin Luther King Day

Week 4-5: How do we negotiate privilege, power and difference when there are dramatic social inequalities? Johnson's take.

Required Reading (RR): Johnson, Privilege, Power and Difference all.

Week 6-7: What is the “social meaning” of money? Zelizer's take.

RR: Zelizer all. **Week 6: Your research project topic DUE. Week 7: ESSAY EXAM #1 DUE.**

Week 8-10: What is “supercapitalism?” Reich's take.

RR: Reich all.

Week 11: SPRING BREAK No Classes

Week-12-13: How does supercapitalism affect kids?

RR: Milner all. Week 12: Your research bibliography DUE with 20 citations.

Week 14-15: Your research PRESENTATIONS.

ESSAY EXAM #2 DUE.